



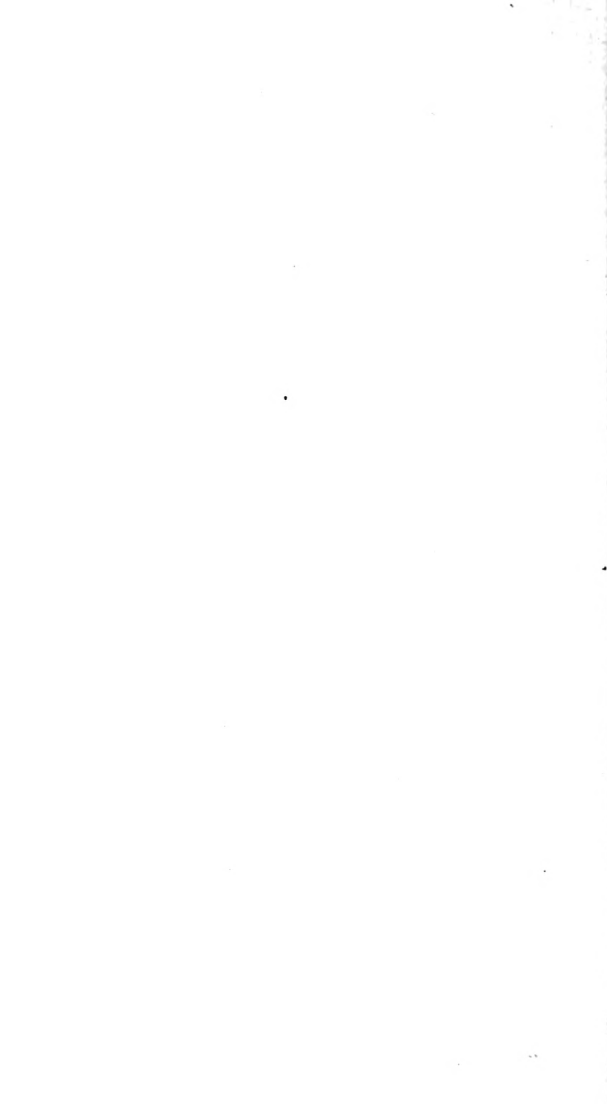


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SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.



SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.

BY

SELINA BUNBURY,

AUTHOR OF "COOMBE ABBEY," "VISIT TO MY BIRTH-PLACE,"
"OUR OWN STORY," ETC. ETC.

"I pray you,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice."—SHAKESPEARE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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SIR GUY D'ESTERRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE Earl of Essex had met from his wearied and fretted mistress the usual doom of spoiled children: his wayward desire, stimulated by the insidious arts of his enemies at Court, was unexpectedly granted: the government of Ireland was arbitrarily conferred upon him, and it was not until he found there was no escape from it, that he clearly perceived how artfully the snare, in which he was caught, had been laid for him.

Then it was that he addressed to his hitherto far too indulgent Queen that melancholy epistle, which, in its poetic portion,

is so little accordant with the aspiring, impetuous character of its writer ; while that of the prose is plainly the outpouring of the chafed spirit of the man of passion.

“From a mind delighting in sorrow ; from spirits wasted with passion ; from a heart torn in pieces with care, grief, and travail ; from a man that hateth himself, and all things else that keep him alive, —what service can your Majesty expect, since any service past deserves only banishment and proscription to the cursedest of all islands ?” &c., &c.

Then follow the lines, the wishes of which were most foreign to the heart of Robert Devereux, and were most unaccomplished in his end :—

“Happy could he finish forth his fate
In some unhaunted desert, most obscure
From all society, from love and hate
Of worldly folk ; then should he sleep secure,
Then wake again, and yield God ever praise,
Content with hips and haws and bramble-berry,

In contemplation passing out his days,
And change of holy thoughts to make him merry ;
And when he dies, his tomb may be a bush
Where harmless robin dwells with gentle thrush."

"Your Majesty's exiled servant,
"ROBERT ESSEX."

But while his enemies secretly triumphed in the success of their scheme, and his wisest friends mourned over this apparent gratification of the Earl's ambition, and he himself began to feel beforehand the danger that might arise from lessening, by absence, the influence he had hitherto held over his once doting, but now irritated, sovereign, there was one of his new train who rejoiced, with pure, unmitigated joy, in the accession of such a chief to the head of the Irish Government. Morven Fitzclare beheld, in the chivalric, generous-hearted Essex, the source of a hope for his country, that had hitherto been unknown to him—the hope of its union.

Its whole history was one of division and strife, wherein the detail of bloodshed and violence was attributable to the fiery,

restless, turbulent disposition of its people, still more than to the injustice or oppression of those who were not of its soil. Feudal strife and party hatred, mortified pride, that gendered revenge, with its consequent horrors—these evils had become more apparent to the young chief during his long captivity in the English Pale, and subsequent more strict imprisonment. Essex dazzled his imagination, and captivated his warm, impulsive affections. To be the follower of such a leader stimulated the ambition that had found little to excite it in the abased circumstances of his country and his own house ; but to follow him to make war on his country, he would not do. Imagination, ever dominant over reason in an Irish genius, devised a glorious project for Essex, his country, and himself. He went there, all but king : armed with powers, and distinguished by honours, never before conferred on a Deputy, or Lord Lieutenant, as that officer was henceforth to be styled. To effect the union of Ireland—the consolidation of its rival parties, its petty feuds, under such a head, and

thus to give it strength sufficient to retain its own constitution, and assume an independence, nationally, which it could not have been said to possess when its narrow boundaries were parted into four petty kingdoms, continually preying one upon the other—this was the scheme that seized on the Irishman's imagination.

An *ignis fatuus* dazzled young Morven in the person of the brilliant Earl: personal gratitude and admiration began what a fervid love of country completed; but while the youth vowed himself and his interests to his service, he made the stipulation—a singular one in such case and such a time, when countrymen fought against each other quite as much as against the stranger—that he should not be required to draw his sword in battle against his own people, even while he attended the person of his lord in the field.

His warm heart, his somewhat wild, but handsome, countenance, and his ardent devotion, readily won him the favour he asked, and admitted him to the personal service of the generous and danger-loving Earl.

Not much given to the keeping of his own counsel, Morven suffered D'Esterre to perceive, if he did not actually explain to him, the vision that floated before his excitable fancy.

“For the love of Heaven, good youth, be silent: you know not the harm you may do your lord!” cried the latter—“Alas! Morven, he is surrounded by those who would fain carry such rash words as yours to where they would be noted against him. He hath already walked into the pitfall blindfolded, that they dug for him. It is not, I fear, such hands as yours that will help him out.”

“You speak in mysteries, sir knight.”

“I am about the Court,” was the cautious reply; and the prudent Englishman walked off, adding a parting injunction to his comrade to remember the saying, that stone walls have ears.

The state of Ireland at the time must here be mentioned, as it occasioned the enforced departure of Essex, as well as of our young knight and his new friend, to that country.

O'Neil, after considerable coquetry with

the English Government, took up arms, as all of his name had previously done, against it. He was doubly armed, for he had the Papal authority, and had received a present from Rome of a plume of consecrated phœnix feathers—symbolic, it must have been intended, of the resuscitation of the land and its faith. Where incompetency did not distinguish the English rulers, venality, and other qualities more injurious to the service they had been sent upon, were their characteristics. The Lord Marshal, Bagnal, had a personal quarrel with O'Neil, who had carried off and married his beautiful sister—another wife, historians say, being still in the way. That he rather goaded him to arms than soothed him to submission, is usually suspected; the sudden death of the Lord Deputy, however, gave O'Neil no little advantage by stopping the operations against him, for Lord Ormond, the native nobleman to whom the military command was intrusted, occupied himself in Leinster, and Sir Henry Bagnal went to act against O'Neil in Ulster.

The Fort of Blackwater was beset by the Irish, and the English garrison reduced to the greatest straits from want of provisions. The Irish—unskilled in besieging, and most dangerous to their adversaries in skirmishes, ambuscades, and sudden onslaught, when, emerging from forests or bogs, they fell on them by surprise—had not succeeded in taking that unfinished fortress by assault, and its garrison bravely endured the horrors of approaching famine. Bagnal, coming to their relief, encountered O'Neil a few miles from the Fort.

The Marshal appeared to be acting under the influence of personal hatred, and his measures were freely discussed by the old veterans who had served under Norris in the Netherlands.

“What think you of that?” said Guy's old friend, Major Anster, pointing with his sword to a disposition making by the Marshal.

“It was not Norris who ordered it,” said the comrade whom he addressed.—“But look you, Anster, what mean those

wild fellows yonder?" Anster looked to the enemy's line: a number of Carmelite friars who ran along it, with outstretched arms and frantic gestures, were calling on the men to fight for their country and their altars, and, like modern representatives of Peter the Hermit, kindling among them the wildest excitement. The wild, savage cries that followed their appeals were appalling even to English soldiers. The Irish clashed their arms to the inspiring music of the bards who accompanied them to the battle, and, raising the war-cry of their leader's clan—"Lamh dearg a-boo!" or, "Hurra for the Red Hand!" rushed on without waiting for the order to charge.

The ground had been chosen and well prepared by O'Neil: the English had to contend with loosely covered fosses, artfully dug in the soft earth, into which they impetuously fell while sustaining the sudden shock of the natives, who, inspired by fanaticism and hope, fought with fury, and broke and scattered the British troops. Anster beheld the havoc committed among men who were worthy of a better fate,

with shame and grief. While rallying a small body, he was leading them back to the fight, Bagnal galloped up, gnashing his teeth with rage and shame; he called on them to follow him, but as he did so, a ball struck him from his horse, and all the passions of this brief life were stilled for ever in his mortal breast!

In Ireland, a victory so complete was looked upon as decisive. O'Neil was considered to be completely triumphant: all the province of Ulster—the northern part of that little island—was abandoned to him and his adherents; the priests who had fled from Elizabeth's laws began to reappear, and the natives retaliated on their oppressors the wrongs they had experienced. Perplexity pervaded even the regal Court. Elizabeth complained that her treasury was wasted, and her trust abused: her parsimony made the expenditure of these wars harassing to herself, and a serious impediment to her generals, as well as cause of suffering to her troops. A new Viceroy was to be appointed: many were named for the office, but the

petulant and spoiled favourite—the young lover of the old Maiden Queen—objected to all. Wearied by the cat-and-dog fashion in which they had so long made love, or yielding to the whispered slanders of his Court enemies, Elizabeth suddenly conferred—with the new title—the Lord Lieutenancy of that wretched land on the rash young lord, who was, perhaps, only seemingly restored to her favour, after having had his ear boxed, and after having unsheathed his sword in return.

If ambition had led Essex to seek the dangerous post, he deeply deplored the error: but the will of Elizabeth was not to be resisted. His enemies rejoiced, not only at the removal of his influence with his once doting mistress, but at the prospect of the ruin into which his ambition and impetuosity would assuredly hurry him.

D'Esterre trembled for him, when he knew that the generous, confiding, noble-spirited Essex was setting forth to an irksome, dangerous government, under the supervision of spies charged by the great Queen, whose suspicion seldom slumbered, to watch and record his conduct.

Nevertheless, with a gallantly equipped host, with 20,000 soldiers at his command, and armed nominally with almost as much power in Ireland as she possessed in England, the noble Earl—the favourite of the people—rode forth to his embarkment, elate with pride, and cheered by the plaudits of admiring crowds.

With him rode Morven O'Connor of Fitzclare, and with him, too, did Sir Guy D'Esterre, rather to his displeasure, return to continue his adventures in the west.

CHAPTER II.

WHATEVER might have been his secret forebodings, it was with a lightened mind that Guy D'Esterre took possession of his apartment in Dublin Castle.

On his table he immediately perceived a small packet placed conspicuously, with the words, "With speed! haste! post haste!" rudely scrawled upon it. Cutting the cord with which it was elaborately tied, he found enclosed within the identical ring that had contributed to his recent troubles; in addition to which the packet only contained this line—"The Lady Hilda Fitzclare.—To the rescue!"

To seek out the bearer of this missive was his first object; but his inquiries on the subject were fruitless: in the bustle

and confusion of the Lord Lieutenant's arrival, many strangers could have passed unnoticed to and fro; and whether this were another device to inveigle him into mischief, or a real demand on his plighted service from Hilda Fitzclare, he found himself unable to determine. He knew his ring had been in the possession of the Lord Marshal, who had lately fallen in battle with O'Neil; but notwithstanding this argument against the supposition that she could have sent it to him with a summons to her help, the mental balance very quickly and fully inclined to that side, and, starting from a brief cogitation, D'Esterre went off in search of Morven, to whom he communicated the occurrence.

Morven either did take, or affected to take, another view of the case, and treated it altogether as a jest played on the returned knight by his comrades. But, seeing the flushing countenance and indignant glance that such a supposition produced, he became graver, and added—

“In any case, good friend, I can act as

your substitute, since I am fain to visit my family forthwith. I have the Lieutenant's leave, and mean to set forth as soon as a horse is made ready."

Sir Guy bit his lip, and twirled the ring on his finger.

"I came hither," he said, "to ask your company on the road, for I meant not to transfer to another a commission made to myself."

Morven smiled carelessly ; the youth had been for more than two years parted from his sister, and his pride was hurt at the appearance, on her part, of renewing the singular acquaintance she had made with the English knight. But a thought darted like lightning to his brain: the intelligence he had received while in the Fleet—the probability that the arts of Symonds would prevail in drawing her into a contract of marriage suddenly occurred to him, and, bounding from his seat, he shouted—

"To horse, Guy ! to horse !—it is that false hound again : Hilda is lost !"

Guy was gone while he yet spoke : the permission, hastily asked, was as readily

given by the Viceroy; and the young men, who had already dined, speedily mounted their horses in the Castle-yard, and soon found themselves several miles from the metropolis.

As Morven appeared to know so well the road to his father's castle, a doubt of their having taken the right one did not enter Sir Guy's mind, although it was one quite unknown to himself. At eventide they approached the deserted convent, and it chanced, at the moment, that Morven, having alighted to re-arrange some of his horse-furniture, Guy led his on in advance, and thus came opposite to the Round Tower and stone cross before the other. Morven was not, however, many yards distant, though a bend in the road kept him out of sight.

It was then that Hilda had seen Guy: and, if her fears had permitted her, might have seen her restored brother also.

The figure, seated on the basement of the stone cross, had first struck Sir Guy as a picturesque object only; but when she sprang up on the pedestal, twining an

arm round the stone, the long cloak fell open, and the night when he had parted from her on the sea-shore was too fresh in his thoughts to allow him to doubt that it was that of Hilda Fitzclare.

Together with Morven, he had searched every part of the deserted building, save that secret one where three trembling creatures were hiding in darkness from the very person who was the object of their mission, and it was only when the utter destitution of the place, into each corner of which they had penetrated, convinced them that no living beings were lodged there, that the joyous-toned laugh of the young Irishman reached the ear that so speedily recognised it ; for—

“ — sooner shall the rose of May
Mistake its own loved nightingale,
And to some meaner minstrel's lay
Open her bosom's glowing veil,
Than love shall ever doubt a tone,
A note, of the beloved one.”

However, poor little Isabel's recognition did no good ; and the glimpse she had of

two officers, in the costume of England, riding quickly away, convinced her of her mistake, for, that Morven Fitzclare would ever don that dress appeared to her as unlikely as that she should appear at Court in one of the eighty wigs of the Maiden Queen.

But, while our four travellers are thus playing at cross purposes, we shall accompany only the male division, leaving the young pilgrims, for the present, to whatever fate may befall them.

It was after about two hours of pretty hard riding that the rather imposing aspect of a castle, of the Norman era of building, caused the younger of the two horsemen to set spurs to his flagging steed and gallop onward, leaving his somewhat surprised companion to follow at a more moderate pace.

The scenery had, to his eye, an air peculiarly melancholy, and strongly contrasted with that of his own merry England; and this effect was increased by the desolate appearance of the castle, which had evidently once been the dwelling-place of

the lord of the soil, but was now quite untenanted.

As Morven rode rapidly into the grass-grown court, and sprung up the steps to its portal, a large owl, startled at the unwonted sound, flew from its habitation above his head, and sailed away heavily. No other living thing was seen.

"We are too late!" Morven exclaimed. "Just Heaven! they are gone!"

A sense of dismay struck on his companion's heart.

"What! was this the residence of your family?" he asked; but Morven, frantically trying to open the postern door, which appeared not to have been strongly secured, gave him no answer. Guy applied to the front portal, on which he knocked loudly and long, hoping some one might have been left to guard the castle; but the hollow, reverberating sound within convinced him it was empty. He desisted from an effort to gain admittance; and, examining the external building, became satisfied that it had been left untenanted for a considerable time. Hastening to Morven, whose excitement did not tend

to quicken his powers of observation, he repeated the inquiry he had before made.

"Do you not know again the place in which you were so long detained?" was the answer.

"Not here—no, it was in a rude fort on the rocks—an insulated fort."

A loud exclamation of joy followed the words.

"Why did you not tell me that sooner? why let me come here?"

"Why not have asked me?" returned Guy, laughing.

"It was here I left my father; here I thought he still remained. But what shall we do now? That fort is quite in another direction, and four times the distance we have already come from here.

"Plague on all Irish brains!" muttered Guy, "to come riding off without ever knowing or asking whither he was going. Well, there is nothing left but to ride for it now. Will our horses carry us?"

"Not to-night: we must try to find lodging somewhere."

"A storm, too, is gathering," Guy rejoined,

glancing up at the gloomy sky, as they remounted their already tired horses, and rode from the grass-grown court more slowly than they had entered it.

On the brow of a small eminence Morven stopped, and, turning in the saddle, looked back on the scene he was leaving. The shades of evening were closing; the wind blew chill: the dark clouds, driven before it, cast a gloom over scenery which, in itself, possessed that melancholy aspect that, at the present day, appears singularly characteristic of an Irish landscape. The deserted castle added tenfold to the sadness of the picture. With a heavy sigh the young man sank again in his saddle, and, striking spurs to his horse, seemed to wish to fly from the scene, and the emotion it excited. But the lagging steeds could no longer keep up their former pace: in a short time neither spur nor whip provoked them to it. The cold mist that had filled the air began to fall in rain; it was driven right in their faces by the wind; and the rudely made road, soon broken up, became troublesome to the weary and flagging horses.

At such a moment a glaring light was discerned among the trees at a short distance. Morven's spirits revived at the prospect of getting hospitality for the night, but the Englishman naturally doubted the wisdom of seeking such from the lawless natives, to whom they were strangers.

"Pah!" said Morven, in answer to this, "if we seek refuge as strangers, fear not but we shall be safe. False friendship is a dangerous thing, and the banquet has often been made the scene of slaughter; but religion renders refuge and hospitality to the stranger and traveller a sacred duty; and fear not that the long-standing law of our land will be violated. Come on, comrade, I will claim our night's lodging in the name of Saint Bridget, whose empty convent we have lately left."

His comrade was happily insensible to the sarcasm of the proposed plea: as a soldier he served his sovereign, but did not consider himself responsible even for the orders he obeyed; and he had gone through the deserted convent without ever thinking it necessary to feel a pang of compunction.

“Let us on, then,” he said, carelessly, “and see what the good saint will do for us ; for, truly, any shelter is better than none on a night so wild as this.”

The light they had seen was caused by a sort of torch, made of peeled rushes dipped in grease, and twisted together to a considerable thickness ; this was fastened in the centre of a rude hall, the door of which stood open. The travellers, to their surprise, and, it must be owned, rather to the apprehension of one of them, saw that it was nearly full, both of men and cattle ; while weapons, resting against the wall and piled on the floor, plainly showed that this was one of the habitations for quartering the roving bands of natives, whose skirmishes so much harassed the English troops : attacking them unawares, and retreating, after such surprisals, to the woods or hills.

Morven threw a glance of meaning to his comrade, and then spoke in the Irish tongue some words that had the instant effect of repressing the tumult caused by

their unexpected appearance : the men, who had caught up their weapons, laid them down, and, from the farther end of the apartment, one, who appeared to be their chief, advanced, and uttered the customary salutation of welcome.

There was an air of superiority in this man's bearing, as, rapidly examining them, he said, in a doubting manner, and in English—

“Ye are Saxon, sirs : how came ye hither alone?”

“We lost our way,” Guy answered, perceiving that Morven was unaccountably silent. “We are unattended, and the night is wild : it is not safe to travel further.”

“Your face is honest, sir soldier,” said the strange host, after a momentary glance at Guy's open countenance.

“And if it were not so, we are in your power, not you in ours,” said he, smiling, “seeing we are but two against some scores of your fellows.”

“Pardon me the doubt,” returned the host, with somewhat more of dignity in

his manner ; “ we rarely keep faith with Saxons, neither do they with us. But St. Bridget forbid we should send wayfarers from our door. Be seated, sirs, and partake of such sorry cheer as our poverty can give you.”

Unable to account for the altered demeanour of his comrade, Guy saw him, with no little surprise, draw his wet cloak around him, and seat himself at the board, resting his face, averted from their gracious host, upon his hand. When the latter turned away to give some order for their entertainment, the young man said, in a low voice,—

“ Do not address me by name : I must not be known here.”

“ Here is a pleasant turn,” thought Guy ; “ I trusted to him, and he is himself among enemies ! But this is only what might be expected in this wretched land, where there are as many factions as families.”

Supper, the principal meal of the day at that time, was placed before the travellers, who were too hungry to be very dainty. While the board was still spread, the hall

was entered by a kern, or native soldier, who rode his small steed straight into it, handed a packet to the chief, and dismounted, as if in a stable. After hastily perusing the tidings it contained, their host drew nearer to his guests, and, speaking in good English, said—

“Ye have travelled far,—your horses were in sorry case?”

There was a tone of inquiry in his voice, to which D'Esterre, seeing Morven wished to be silent, again answered by saying they had only come from Dublin, but had mistaken their road.

“From Dublin? ha! It is said the new Deputy hath arrived with a gallant band.”

“A band of some twenty thousand strong,” was the rather significantly expressed reply.

“To which belike ye belong?”

“Yes,” was the unequivocal response of D'Esterre.

“Do ye return now to Dublin?”

“No: we are on our way to the coast.”

“It is not safe travelling.”

“We have met no molestation.”

“Know ye not that the country is all up before ye?”

"We hoped the rebels were inclined to submit to Lord Essex."

"Rebels!"—but checking himself, he added—"The fort on the coast, to which you may be travelling, is in the hands of the rebels, as you are pleased to call them."

"And the garrison?" asked D'Esterre, anxiously.

"It was a scant one when taken," the other answered, leaving him to draw his conclusion as to the rest.—"You know that fort, it seems?"

"Yes: I was one of its garrison some months ago; it is not far from the chieftain, O'Connor of Fitzclare." As soon as he had said this, D'Esterre felt his error, for his comrade made an impatient movement, that betokened irritation he did not wish to manifest.

"O'Connor—is he your friend?—that is likely. They say he is making alliances with the Saxons, and is about to match his fair daughter with one of the baser sort"—the speaker's fiery eye lighted up—"an adventurer, a follower of Bagnal's, who undertakes to procure the freedom of her brother in exchange for her hand and dower: and well I

wot that the tamed and crouching spirit of the father would stoop to the barter rather than win his rights by the sword."

"O'More, you dare not say that were O'Connor present!" cried Morven, springing to his feet. D'Esterre, too, rose, and instinctively laid his hand on his sword. The name of the outlawed chieftain, against whom he had acted on the night of his rencontre with O'Connor, adding not a little to his prospect of an approaching collision.

But O'More was intently regarding the excited face of his young countryman and relative: the deep flush of passion changed upon his own, while he did so, to a deadly pallor.

"It is—it is," he murmured, "my sister's son—in the dress of the Saxon, in the service of Elizabeth of England!" And in a lower, suppressed voice he uttered some apostrophe, which, being in his native language, was only intelligible to his own countryman.

Morven felt it. He dropped again upon his seat, and, laying his arms on the table, rested his face upon them. It was not for long he rested thus.

"I am aware," he said, once more rising up, "that my motives and reasons may not be easily commended to you, O'More; but let me speak with you apart, and you shall hear them."

A scornful smile was his only answer.

"Sir Guy D'Esterre," said the chief, turning to him, "you have thought yourself unknown here: but it was not so. You only serve your lawful masters: you sought our hospitality, and it is freely given to you as to a stranger. With traitors we keep no terms; but having promised hospitality to one I did not know, I tell thee thy friend is safe as thyself beneath the wretched roof that shelters the O'More. But take heed and guard him well, if we meet thy gay-plumed comrade in another way; for I swear if I meet my sister's son bearing arms against his country in the field, my own sword shall find its passage through that shining breast-plate to the caitiff heart it shields!"

With a fierce clang he plunged back in its scabbard the weapon he had partly drawn, and, with a haughty bend of his head, added—

"I bid you a fair good night, Sir Guy ;" and, motioning an attendant to lead the strangers to the room made ready for them, their strange host silently passed away.

Morven flung himself on his couch, threw his cloak over his head, and D'Es-terre, seeing he resigned himself to obstinate silence, if not to sleep, placed his sword ready for his hand, and, committing himself, as usual, to the care of Heaven, tried to forget the vexations of the day in slumber. He was disturbed by some one entering the very rude chamber in which they lay. The dim light allowed him to see it was only an old man, who, a little to his surprise, took a seat near their beds, and commenced a droning sort of tale—half sung, half said, in a dull monotony of sound, that had, as it was designed to have, the effect of soon putting the travellers to sleep ; but, notwithstanding his long and rather harassing ride, Guy's watchfulness enabled him to know that this bard, or tale-teller, continued thus to honour the strangers through the greater part of the night.

A cheerful morning sun dispelled the dark thoughts that had dwelt in the young knight's mind ; but his comrade was still dull and dispirited : they saw no more of their host. A follower informed them he had left this gloomy abode at dawn of day : they doubted the fact, believing that he would not have left them to the dubious care of his wild, lawless band.— They were, however, dismissed with due honour, after partaking of the morning repast and parting draught.

CHAPTER III.

WITH refreshed horses, and under the influence of a pleasant April sun, the young men rode forward, hoping to reach the sea-girt fort of the chieftain before the evening. But while the spirits of the English knight revived, those of his comrade fell. His unexpected meeting with O'More had led Morven to feel what in his impulsiveness he had hitherto overlooked—the loss he must sustain in the estimation of his kinsmen by entering the service of England. The motives that led him to do so could not be declared before his dress alone announced the fact. Whether those motives could be explained or not, was now the subject that occupied his thoughts, for to act

first, and consider secondly, was somehow a national habit into which he was prone to fall. Thus, while their safe escape from what Sir Guy called the rebel's den contributed not a little to add to the invigorating effects of an early ride, when sunshine cheered the then thick woods in which that den was placed, and brightened the low mountains which then, as they still are, were always discoverable in the landscapes of the country—the young man—to whom the brilliant Essex was what the candle is to the moth—left his companion to enjoy these influences if he pleased, and on his own part showed far less animation than he had displayed during the annoyances of their journey on the preceding evening.

An abrupt turn in the rough bridle-road which they pursued gave, however, a sudden check to the more pleasurable sensations of Sir Guy, for the startling scene before them assured them their adventures were not ended.

A wide space of what might be called table land, though the hills around it were small and scattered, was covered

with rude booths made of branches, and partially protected from rain by coverings of skin, straw, or whatever could be got to answer that end. All around, stretched at length, sitting erect or idly standing, were a great number of men, women, and children, intermingled with animals of other classes—flocks and herds, brought out here for a summer's graze.

The human beings were in the extremes of costume, from one that very nearly approached the earliest and simplest fashion known to their race, to that of the thick shaggy mantle which was a defence against the summer heat and winter cold.

“It is a booly,” said Morven; “there is nothing to fear. These are poor people who lead pastoral lives: they abandon their poor houses in the spring, and come to these lighter and fresher tents, feeding their flocks on the otherwise waste pasturage.”

It was a patriarchal custom, still common in the mountainous countries of Europe, but, being unpractised in England, was a strange and startling sight to D'Esterre.

"I doubt," he said, "that these savage-looking creatures will allow us to pass without at least seeking to levy a toll."

"We are on the territories of O'Connor of Fitzclare," answered young Morven, with some pride. "Rest you here a space, Sir Guy, and leave me to deal with these people."

D'Esterre, notwithstanding this order, followed him so closely as to be at his side in the event of danger. Morven rode into the midst of the booby, and spoke a few words loudly in Irish. A shout rent the air in answer; the terminating word of "aboo" told him it was the war-cry of the chief. With wild vociferations, with frantic gesticulations, and the tenderest, yet most uncouth-sounding expressions, they surrounded their young lord; while his comrade sat still on his horse to see how the event would turn, doubting if it were joy or rage, affection or hatred, that so excited the uncivilized creatures, whose warm impulses, or utter ignorance, prevented them from discovering, as O'More had done, that Morven had entered the hated service of England.

The wandering tribes of Scythia might have had their descendants among these people, who, having presented the strangers with hard bread baked on embers, and milk freshly drawn from the cow, suffered them at length to go on their way.

The incident revived the variable spirits of the Hibernian youth: while D'Esterre wondered, Morven only felt that his own and his father's people had welcomed him, and the impression made by O'More's indignation was dispelled.

They reached the island fortress of O'Connor about an hour after Symonds had left it. The news of Essex's arrival had soon reached him, and, combining with it the pretended pilgrimage of the lady of his pursuit, he began to apprehend a source of danger to his plans which required fresh schemes on his part to avert. For this reason he had resolved to follow the young pilgrims on their road, and discover the true purpose of their mission.

The chieftain was thus left alone with his always numerous band of retainers at the time the young men arrived.

The shout of some of the clan, who, idly reclining on the rocks, were the first to recognise their young chief, pierced with an almost agonizing intensity of pain the heart of the father ; so hopeless and spirit-broken had he become, that even sounds of joy were to his ear but heralds of sorrow.

On the rock, surrounded by the eager retainers, he saw two English officers ; and on his advance one of them sprang forward, with an exclamation in the Irish language that thrilled to his very soul. It was, indeed, “the pulse of his heart,” the “light of his eyes,” his own long-lost boy, that rushed to his embrace. The chieftain’s large, wide-spread hands were laid on the young man’s shoulders—his outstretched arms held him back—his eyes almost glared over his person.

“You are Saxon,” was his salutation ; and he turned away.

Morven stood motionless where he left him : it was but for a moment. The wild emotions of his clan had been excited, and it was not easy at once to change their current, or even to calm them, so as to suffer the men

to understand the cause of their chief's conduct. Without regarding it in the least, they raised the war-cry of the Fitzclare, and, lifting their young lord on their shoulders, rushed on with him over the rocks, and bore him into the hall of his fathers. Then did the natural feelings of the easily changed chieftain give way, and, opening his wide arms, he clasped his long-lost boy to his huge breast.

Guy, unheeded in the tumult, was left to himself; and, witnessing the reunion from a distance, believed it wiser to let whatever explanation Morven wished to give of his apparent league with the English be made between themselves. He cast a keen glance into the crowded hall, and knew at once that the two forms, which might have been seen among its rude masses like a gleam of light in a dark dungeon, were not there,—the very ones that should have been the foremost to welcome the brother and lover after his long absence were wanting.

How much this fact operated in forming the opinion of Sir Guy as to the propriety of leaving the father and son to themselves, it

is of small importance now to conjecture: instead of entering the hall, he strolled onward over the rocks, and by degrees found himself approaching the tower, which was separated by a narrow chasm, as has been already said, from the rest of the building. The strong drawbridge over this rent in the mass of rock was now down; the tower no longer appeared to be jealously set apart from the fort to which it belonged. Guy passed unchallenged over the bridge, and soon reached the rocky platform that was connected in his mind with the most curious adventure, and he felt—combat the idea as he would—the most interesting memories which his life had hitherto afforded.

It was with some eagerness he ascended to that platform: the shouts of the clan he readily believed were too common to have been noticed by the fair dwellers in that rude tower; and that he might be the first to announce to them the glad tidings of the release and return of the hostage of Fitzclare was a pleasant supposition.

There is something in utter solitude that strikes on the heart with a gloomy sense of

evil. The sound of the dashing waves was all that broke the deep silence : he stood, and gazed around ; and the conviction that the place was deserted struck heavily on his very heart.

“ Am I too late ?—are *we* too late ?” he said, half aloud, correcting even to his own ear the first form of his speech. “ Hilda ! art thou already sacrificed ?—Oh ! weak, self-sacrificing woman, ever ready to believe a noble cause is gained by a base surrender !”

The cry of a sea-gull made him start :—it might have been the spirit of Hilda reproving the soliloquizer. The bird circled round and darted out of sight : another louder cry was heard—a splendid eagle lighted on the rock. The incident that had alarmed his fair warder was recalled to Guy’s recollection. That it was not the eagle, but the head of the man called Lawrence, that had displaced the rock over which he had been peering, Guy had, before this time, been convinced ; but why the same man who had given information against his lord should journey to London, in order to remove the consequences that

had followed that information, he could not yet imagine; being ignorant of the facts that accounted for it—namely, the rupture between the confederates, Lawrence and Symonds, by means of which the vengeful zeal of the former was, in a great degree, averted from Fitzclare, by being directed against his base associate; and that, in determining to save Hilda from him, Lawrence could find no instrument to employ so meet for the purpose as the Saxon knight, who, he believed, did not lack the will, if he could only regain the power, to snatch her from his iniquitous grasp.

From their discourse, which was often overheard by this spy, Lawrence had learned the intimacy of Sir Guy with the powerful favourite of Queen Elizabeth, and he had managed to reach the ear of the Lord of Essex, and given him such a version of his former comrade's adventure, as gave the character of a love affair to the whole matter.

All this was not understood by our hero at the time he stood, in disappointed mood, musing on the now deserted rock.

But where now was Hilda? He asked the question; but the cry of the eagle, that appeared to be waiting for its weaker prey, was all that answered. Guy felt, rather than knew, that she was not there. The fate of the little Isabel did not so much rack his distressed thoughts: but it is true, he had no reason to conjecture that the little lady had been forced into a despicable marriage, from a mistaken motive: a motive that would now only cause poor Hilda deeper pain, since her brother's release rendered the sacrifice as useless in appearance as it had always been in reality.

Applying his hand to the low-arched door, it opened; and doubtfully, yet still with the heartfelt impression that the spirit that somehow held communion with his own was not near him then, Guy entered the lady's bower—a rude one, indeed, but once inhabited by one to whom he believed a loyal knight might be proud to pledge his service.

The black oak chair, in which she had sat during their discourse about the scene

at Cadiz, stood stiffly in its place. Guy did not seat himself in it ; leaning his arms on the high back, he bent down his broad forehead, and——we pause in the record of his conduct. Guy D'Esterre was a valiant knight of Norman race, and it might appear shame to hint that the thick double lashes through which we before described him as peering out at the vision that haunted the rushy couch whereon he lay wounded, were slightly moistened when he raised up his head, after meditating on the life, and now too probable fate, of Hilda Fitzclare.

CHAPTER IV.

THE evening closed in boisterous revelry in the hall of O'Connor of Fitzclare. The retainers celebrated the return of their young chief with all the license which such an unhopcd-for event permitted. Usquebaugh circulated abundantly; the conviviality of the supper, or of what we would now call dinner, was continued to a length that exhausted the patience of the English knight, whose head reeled from the effects of the copious pledges to which he had been challenged. The wild and, to his ear, clamorous voices, whose language he did not understand, tended still more to its confusion: the old bard, in his seat of honour, chanted strange tales

of bygone times, guessed at by him only by the increased excitement of the clansmen, and the corresponding depression of their moody and fallen chieftain, who, at length making a short address to them in Irish, and giving them leave to continue their drunken revelry, retired from the hall to hold another consultation with his son.

Sir Guy anxiously sought for an opportunity of inquiring from Morven concerning his sister and his betrothed, neither of whom he had seen, although, on such an occasion, if they had been in the fort, it was reasonable to suppose that they would have graced even so rude a festival with their presence. It was, therefore, rather provoking to him to receive a hurried apology from his young host, who, consigning him to the charge of the ancient bard, who was to conduct him with due observance to his apartment, told him his father required his attendance on a matter of importance.

It was rather late the next morning before Guy had slept off the consequences of Irish hospitality. Eager to have his

doubt satisfied, he hastened from his room in search of Morven. He found the morning meal prepared for himself only, and on inquiring for his hosts, could only comprehend, from signs made in answer, that they had gone somewhere to a distance from the coast.

In vain he sought for any one who could speak the Queen's English: old Canna, whom he intercepted once, fled from him with looks of horror, throwing up her arms in vehement gesticulations, and muttering wild-sounding words, which the good knight feared were anything but those of benediction.

He had nothing to do all day but to look at and listen to the waves. The tower was still apparently deserted; the clansmen were mostly absent; the few who remained were lying on the rock or in the hall, still under the influence of the previous night's potations.

Indignant at this neglect, disappointed in his expectation, and impatient in all respects at his situation, he counted the wearisome hours of the day, in the still

erroneous belief that each succeeding one would bring back his truant comrade.—Evening, however, had closed in, when a plodding peasant made his appearance on the shore, signaling for the passage-boat. This man delivered him a note from Morven, apologizing for his absence; assuring him that it had been his intention to return at an earlier hour, but that his father wished him to attend him to see some of his friends; and adding a request that D'Esterre would account for his prolonged absence at Dublin Castle, which, he added—"I hope may do good service to our Lieutenant."

"Heaven send it may do not ill service to thyself—thou Irish-headed and Irish-hearted boy!" was our knight's apostrophe, as he read the billet. He would fain have ordered his horse, and been off forthwith; but it was already night, and he had once more to resign himself to the dreariness of a lonely lodging in the chief-tain's rock-built fort, comforted only by the prospect of a departure from it at break of day.

But in the visions of our head upon our beds, matters not unfrequently assume a different aspect from that they bore in the light and stir of the day : and so it came to pass that Sir Guy, having been in that sort of state which is succinctly described as not knowing what to do with himself, was baffled in the attempt to take refuge from such an embarrassment in sleep ; and as he lay awake, the latter part of the billet he had got from Morven appeared to him to have a latent meaning that had been undiscovered before.

He was not altogether wrong in thinking so, although, from not understanding circumstances that were simple enough in themselves, he created a complexity that really did not exist.

The facts of the case were, that Morven had naturally learned, almost immediately on his arrival, the nature of the expedition on which Hilda and Isabel had departed. He was conscious that some ridicule might attach to it ; and saw that Sir Guy's assertion that the former had been seen by him at the deserted convent was correct, though he

had laughed at the description his comrade gave of it at the time as a wild fancy ; he had, therefore, rather avoided any allusion to her. He had, however, intended, when he left the fort with his father at break of day, to return to it within a few hours, a part of which, he might satisfy himself by thinking—if indeed he thought at all on any subject before he acted—his friend would spend in sleep ; and thus it was only when he found his absence would be prolonged that he recollected the probable return of the young pilgrims, and the fact that they would find Sir Guy left in possession of the fort. This was not what the young man desired, and the commission with which he charged the knight to Dublin Castle was, indeed, as the latter now interpreted it, another mode of informing him that he need not await his return. This Guy plainly understood ; but in his nightly cogitations he added to this fact the conjecture that Hilda was in some way the cause of Morven's abrupt departure, purposely kept secret from him ; and, therefore, to wait the chieftain's return, instead of acting on Morven's inhos-

pitiable hint, became his perverse determination.

Another day was, consequently, lingered out at the island fort: its close brought neither travellers nor pilgrims; neither the chieftain nor his son; neither Hilda nor little Isabel appeared to relieve his *ennui*; and on the next—muttering in Saxon a thousand things which it would not be polite to utter in Irish to his rude but generous entertainers—Sir Guy, in a very petulant temper, took his departure.

The sun was bright—for the pleasant month of May was close at hand: the old bard marshalled the guest to the rocky steps descending to the boat, and then sat on the edge of the cliff, playing his wild harp and chanting a plaintive air as it made for the coast. The scene was picturesque undoubtedly, and the rough clansmen who watched his departure gave it additional effect; but so strange was our young knight's humour, that he saw nothing worthy of his attention in it all: a sort of moody recollection of a different parting was in his mind;—a vision of a past-away moonlit scene

swept between his mental eye and that actual and sunny one; and to a peculiarity of taste, moulded perhaps in degree by a life of military adventure, we must ascribe his singular preference for the former; wherein a single tall figure—shrouded in a long, coarse, Irish mantle, the large hood partially revealing the face which the moonbeams showed to be so pale and anxious—was in the foreground; and the parting of the lady and the knight beneath the moonbeams, though that parting were made in doubt and dread, was dwelt on now with a fondness of memory that caused the murmured words—

“Sweet Hilda! I will find thee yet.”

Perhaps it was in pursuance of this resolve that Sir Guy, without even vouchsafing a look at the retreating boat, which he had on a former occasion watched so intently when oared back by the witch-like old Celt, mounted his horse on the rocky coast, and, soon striking off from it without a parting glance to the grand pile of island rocks, took his way direct to the desecrated convent of Saint Bridget.

That the figure he had seen clinging to the pedestal of the stone carved cross had more than a fancied resemblance to the childish one he had seen in the convent chapel of Cadiz, and to that which he now recalled as distinctly as he had seen it at the moment when it afterwards stood erect in the boat that receded in moonlight and disappeared in mist,—he was perfectly assured, and the hope came very strongly and undeniably to his heart, that Hilda had fled from the base persecution of Symonds, and was still concealed in that deserted convent.

D'Esterre looked down at his signet ring, which had become a connecting link in the chain of his Irish adventures, and, apparently inspired by the recollection of the message he had received with it, the knight-errant spurred on his course to Saint Bridget's.

Alas! silence the most profound was all that he met there: the echo of his own clanking steps through the empty chambers was all he heard. No living thing did he see. The stone cross stood still and calm

beside the tall Round Tower; his horse cropped the high grass that covered the court; and the disappointed knight left the desolate place with a sadness of heart which the scene alone was, perhaps, capable of inspiring.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a reception at the Castle of Dublin. The Earl of Essex held a Court. When D'Esterre arrived there, he found only time to make his toilet ; and, equipping himself in the bravery which the Viceroy, in imitation of his regal mistress, loved to display, he forthwith repaired to the antechamber, where many officers and others, both English and natives, were already in waiting.

A group of the former appeared to find a point of attraction in the lower end of the room, where many, especially of the younger of these officers, were congregated. Guy, as he proceeded to join his comrades, possessed the advantage of a figure taller than most of them, and perceived at once what that

attraction was. Two ladies in rich Spanish dresses appeared as anxious to escape observation as their striking appearance was calculated to excite it.

Sir Guy's step lost its firmness ; it wavered —halted. He gazed for one moment ; then, deviating from his course altogether, he walked apart from the military group to which he had been advancing, and, making a circuit, approached nearer than they were to a corner of the apartment, and stopped almost quite close to Hilda Fitzclare and little Isabel.

His joyfully smiling brown eyes met the deep blue ones that had, as he had lately almost discovered, been calmly shining on his heart ever since he had first met their soul-expressing gaze. Perhaps for an instant there was some slight change in their expression as they met his ; but, if so, it was too quickly hidden to be discernible. The deep lids were dropped : Sir Guy's salutation was checked by the action, and his low bow was answered by a bend of the stately figure, so haughty and distant as to appear purposely designed to mortify the presump-

tion in which he had confidently approached the objects of admiration which others were only anxious to behold from a distance.

Had this been the lady's purpose, it would have only succeeded in the opinion of spectators, but have failed so far as the delinquent was concerned. No sense of mortification was felt by the proud young knight, but a deep pain—one deeper and more heartfelt than he had known through the whole course of his rather sunny existence—was experienced by him, as, stepping backward, he placed himself against the wall, and, looking still on the face that, in spite of self-control, flushed and grew pale beneath the sense of his gaze, though the still downcast eyes saw it not, he said in his own mind the words—

“She is married. That wretch has brought her here to win some favour for him. Yes! even her dress is a compliment to Essex!”

Thus thought Guy D'Esterre, as, leaning against the wall, his eyes unconsciously, but most steadily, were fastened on the singularly beautiful face, the shifting colour of which might have told him that such a gaze

was as inconsiderate as it was becoming insupportable. All heroes fold their arms ; we have no warrant for asserting that ours did so, although it is doubtful that he has any right to appear in the pages of a romance, especially in such a scene as this, without folded arms. Nevertheless, with a pertinacious gaze, in which pity and interest were blended with what some keen observer might call a large proportion of admiration, Guy continued to regard his former warder, unconscious that the fairy Isabel, half hidden behind her, clung to her side, peering at himself with a face so full of infantile fear and wonder as considerably to distract the attention bestowed upon her friend by the English officers, and draw their notice and admiration upon herself—so pretty and childish did she look. In fact, Guy D'Esterre only awoke to a recollection of his apparent audacity by seeing Hilda Fitzclare, with an air of something like scorn on her proud features, take the hand of the little trembler, and, passing him by with a haughtily raised head, seek another position. But, even then, though he mentally owned to in-

discretion, he only vented something like a malediction on Symonds, and felt deeper pity for her, and, it may be, a little twinge of regret for himself,—so liable are we to form wrong ideas respecting the conduct and motives of others.

But the spell that had held the knight there, as if chained to the wall, was dissolved when the graceful Spanish dresses passed away from the spot. As they disappeared beyond the throng, a deep-drawn sigh burst his thralldom : yet he did not follow the direction they had taken ; on the contrary, sensible that the lady had felt and wished to avoid a recognition that had been, perhaps, a little too ardently made, he went off, as he believed, in another, and entered a room where some of the older officers were discussing matters of more apparent importance to the state of the nation.

A little apart from them Guy saw his sturdy old friend, Major Anster, and, approaching him, was saluted with the words—

“Soh ! safe once more ? Give you joy, lad ; it is to your good luck more than your discretion that you owe it.”

“I have not been in danger, that I know of, good friend ; nor do I understand your meaning.”

“Of course not : when young men will be fools, old ones speak enigmas to them : marry, good youth, such gray heads as mine would judge that the fair dames of old England might suit a young fancy, without thrusting one’s self into prisons and crown lawyer’s hands for the yellow-kirtled Irishry!”

Guy glanced uneasily round : his fear was more than verified ; for, there was that tall, black, Spanish-dressed lady, standing with a man attired in the English fashion, and an elderly lady, under whose protection she had come there, and half concealed by the pillar that intervened between them. He saw a sudden start ; a quick expression of surprise, followed by one of mingled pain and pride ; the emotion was subdued almost instantaneously, and the lady stood calm and composed, not appearing to have heard or understood what was said.

“You are under some strange mistake, worthy sir,” said Guy, stiffly, as he wished to move away.

"For all that," cried the old soldier, grasping his arm, "do thou take a graybeard's warning, and make sure of the faith and loyalty of that yellow-haired maid before thine own is placed in her keeping."

"Thank Heaven! her hair is raven black!" was Guy's inward ejaculation, as, holding fast the arm placed in his, he hurried from the spot.

"Tell me, good Anster," he said aloud, eager to change the conversation, "how go matters here with our noble Earl?"

"How go they? why they are like to go as well as his enemies at Court may expect."

"What! already?" said D'Esterre, in an alarmed tone.

"Hah! you are one, then, Guy, who suspect that breakers ahead were discerned by the far-seeing eyes of those who sent him hither?"

"But why speak thus darkly, good Anster? prithee say out what hath been done."

"Why, Southampton is Master of the Horse, contrary to her Majesty's desire."

"But she gave the Earl absolute power in this land; almost as absolute as her own?"

“Aye! such power as a puppet has when the strings are moved behind the board.— See how she will rage when she hears of this.”

“There is no cause, methinks, for which she should object to Southampton.”

“Know you not that he hath sinned without remedy against her Grace’s prerogative and pleasure in taking him a wife according to his own fancy?”

“Thank Heaven, I am unknown to Court.”

“Aye, lad, an alliance with the wild and savage Irishry might put thy head in jeopardy were it otherwise.”

As the old soldier spoke these words, a general movement caused Sir Guy to turn round. The Lord Lieutenant had made his appearance. Brilliant in attire, winning in manner, and captivating in appearance, Essex, the admired of all admirers, flashed like a gleam from the gay, splendid, but corrupt court of the Maiden Queen, across the murky atmosphere of that exhibited in the Irish capital; and while all paid him homage, it was with no little wonderment that D’Esterre beheld his unmistakably paid to Hilda

Fitzclare. He saw the glance which he boldly cast on the little Isabel, whose child-like coquetry and innocent beauty might allure it, change to a deep respectful admiration, and his daring eyes, too seldom abashed by maiden pride, almost sink before the calm sweetness of those that seemed to meet their gaze as if the mind they represented were occupied by thoughts so far apart from his, that, like two persons speaking divers languages, the speech of one neither pleased nor offended the other. Essex had taken her hand, and wished to lead her to the dance that was about to be formed; Sir Guy did not hear her words as she hung back. It was a pity he did not, for he would then have understood matters differently.

“Noble Earl,” said Hilda, “while a father’s honour is attainted, and a brother’s life in jeopardy, it would ill become the child or sister to share in the world’s pleasures.”

But he heard the Earl’s answer, as, touching with his lips the fingers he had taken, he released them, saying—

“We shall take your words as a promise, fairest lady, and hope ere long to claim the guerdon of our service.”

Tormented by doubt, and impatient at all he saw or partially heard, Sir Guy's pride forbade him to force himself on the notice of one who thus haughtily rejected his advances towards a renewal of an acquaintance so singularly made. The circumstances of which he was ignorant, and the result of which so much perplexed him, were very simple.

On their reaching the capital, the young pilgrims, or rather adventurers, immediately heard the intelligence of the arrival of the Earl of Essex as the new Lord Lieutenant, with such extraordinary powers intrusted to him as at once caused the former to renounce her hazardous voyage to the Court of his sovereign, assured that an application to the generous Essex himself would be more likely to succeed.

The Earl was not a little surprised at receiving two such suitors, among the very first of those who were thronging to claim his clemency, or test his much renowned generosity. Led as he had been into the dissipation, the vices, that unhappily distinguished the British Court, the husband of Sir Philip Sidney's widow, neglected though that lady

was, was not devoid of a love of virtue, an admiration of what was excellent in woman ; and his speech to D'Esterre, when he waited on him the day after the scene we have recorded, expressed the real sentiment with which his claimant had inspired him.

“By my troth, Sir Guy, were we back in the days of Richard the Lion-hearted, scores of lances would be shivered ere such a lady fair as she should have to weep a wrong undressed ! She is one who in the good times of old might have called up the chivalry of Europe to do her right.”

The coolness of the knight's reply drew upon him a scrutinizing glance from his Lord.

“The lady Hilda knows not, it seems, of her brother's release ?”

“I wished her not know of it until I produced him. Nor of thine own, good youth !” he added, with a laugh. “Which of the twain will be most pleasing to her ear, think you ? Certes, we know not. Sir Guy, I swear to you, the proud-hearted wench never made suit for the lover, while she pleaded right boldly for father and brother !”

"I know not, my good lord," said D'Esterre, gravely, "who the lover may be ; report saith the lady hath already a husband."

Essex started. With a hasty exclamation, he looked up from the papers he had been carelessly examining—

"I have kept faith with you, Guy : do not you break it with me. Is she not your own liege love ?"

"Such," answered Guy, and his colour rose unnecessarily high as he spoke, "such was the tale that was reported to you in London ; I know not what warrant the knave had for framing it ; but this I know, that, though I have no claim upon her favour, the lady demeans herself with a haughty avoidance towards me, that shows she desires the passages that have passed should be either unknown or forgotten ; and sorry should I be to cross her wish !"

"Hey-day !" said the Earl, laughingly. "Is this a lover's quarrel, with both parties carrying their heads so high as not to be able to see each other's countenance ; or is it a natural consequence of being in this land of mist and bog, where people can never see

their way straightforward to the point they want to reach?"

"As it certainly is not the first, it must be supposed to be the last of your lordship's suppositions," answered Guy, with a bow and smile, "and I can only pray that from such mistiness Heaven may grant us all a good deliverance!"

CHAPTER VI.

SIR GUY D'ESTERRE had received an order some days afterwards from the Lord Lieutenant to be in waiting. He had, accordingly, spent a rather wearisome hour, lolling on a somewhat uneasy seat in a closet adjoining the private cabinet of the Viceroy. The opening of that door gave him intimation of the entrance of some person or persons, but they were so noiseless that he could not otherwise be conscious of the fact. The opposite one also almost immediately opened, and Essex came in. His mode of salutation, which was seen and heard by him, left Guy without doubt as to the identity of the visitors. Hilda and Isabel were there ; both veiled, and both now in the Irish costume. That deep melody of voice, which was Na-

ture's gift, and not the birthright of country, told him it was Hilda Fitzclare who spoke. It was a remarkable voice, untinctured by the intonation that is characterized by the term "brogue," but full, mellifluent, and dropping on the ear like cadences of wild music.

Sir Guy approached the open door, and, when he had done so, he both saw the speaker and heard her words distinctly.

"Noble Earl," said Hilda, in reply apparently to a question from Essex, "I have come to plead for a brother's freedom, or, it may be, for a brother's life. I seek for either as a favour, and meant not to argue for it as a justice. I am not here to impeach the honour of Sir Guy D'Esterre, or to defend ourselves from his impeachments: his falsehood or his truth have nought to do with the suit I urge."

"But who," cried D'Esterre, striding with utter contempt of ceremony into the apartment, "who would dare to say that these were doubted?"

They stood face to face: the lady calm and grave; the knight flushed and angry: but their eyes met, and her face was suffused with the rush of blood which a quick thrill

of delight, of joy, sent bounding from the heart, as that gaze seemed to utter there the words—"He is true!"

"Ho! without there! ho!" cried Essex; and, an opposite door flying back, there stood Morven Fitzclare, whose return Essex had contrived to keep concealed from all until this little drama was arranged.

Isabel, with a cry so fully blent with joy and pain, surprise, fear, and delight, that one could not tell what emotion prevailed, sprang forward, with outstretched arms, between him and Essex, as if she believed he had only been produced in order to be executed.

"Save him!—spare him!—good my lord, spare him," she exclaimed, falling on her knees before the Earl.

"Sweet mistress Isabel, he shall be your prisoner now, if he wishes to exchange his late fetters for the rosy ones those bright eyes can form," was his reply, as at once both he and the somewhat astonished youth lifted her from her position.

"And you, most lovely lady," he added, turning to Hilda, "you will tread a mea-

sure with me now? We shall dance the brawl to-night."

But pale and cold, without a word or sound, she sunk on her brother's breast, her long black hair falling over the arms in which he held her.

"I called Fitzclare to the rescue, Sir Guy," Essex whispered, as passing him by, he withdrew from the agitation he had caused, "for it is not seemly when a gallant knight well nigh draws his sword on lady fair."

But the speaker bit his lip as he uttered the last inconsiderate words, and a deep flush mounted to his brow as they recalled the memory of that miserable, never-to-be forgotten scene between himself and his old lady-love, the world-admired Maiden Queen, when she slapped his face, and he drew his sword to threaten punishment in return.

Guy smiled his answer : the calm gaze of a mind-revealing eye had changed the stormy current of his blood, and no explanations were needed to make him very peacefully disposed towards her who had unwittingly aroused his ire. Yet did he appear at the same time tempted to renew the controversy; since, while Morven Fitzclare was occupied

in bestowing a rather too long retarded embrace on the childishly loving little Isabel, he drew near his sister, down whose pale face the tear-drops fell in silence, and while Isabel was laughing, weeping, trembling, and chattering, uttering a thousand follies, and contradicting all she uttered, he, leaning over Hilda's bowed-down head, said, in what perhaps he intended to be a very stiff and stand-off tone—

“You doubted me, Lady Hilda?”

“My heart did not, does not,” she replied, without raising her head.

“Thanks ! thanks !” said Guy, “if that heart is on my side, I care not what is against me.”

The face to which he bent was no longer pale ; perhaps, had Sir Guy at that moment asked if the heart of which they spoke might be his for the natural term of its natural life, much trouble might have been spared : but such precipitancy never entered his thoughts: he had made a very long stride on the road to that point, but his progress was not, as yet, sensible to himself ; and, as he did not reach it at this seemingly favourable mo-

ment, we must leave him to pursue his way if he can, while we pass over the interval, and hasten on to more stirring events.

That interval was chiefly spent in gaieties and pleasures which nearly turned the fairy Isabel's head, and even changed the gravity of the serious Hilda. Accustomed to the grotesque and varied amusements with which his pleasure-loving and imperious Queen caused her adulatory courtiers to entertain her, or to provide for her, Essex enlivened his dreary Court with sports, shows, dances, and revelry. It was a new era in the hitherto rudely passed or secluded lives of the two girls: the elder, only just nineteen, found herself pleasantly drawn into the current, which the younger wildly entered. Led forward by the man on whom all eyes were set, in whom all Irish hope was centered, their beauty and gracefulness acquired a tenfold lustre in the circle wherein they moved. Their manner, to which a foreign education had given a peculiar charm, proved more captivating to the noble Earl than mere beauty, bringing to him continual recollections of the most brilliant, and perhaps the

happiest part of his life—his conquest and possession of Cadiz—a subject often alluded to between them, when Hilda's incomparable eyes would deepen in their blue, until within their dark lashes they looked almost black, and the suffusion of her cheek would tell him her thoughts more eloquently than words.

Then the new Lord Lieutenant favoured the Irish music, which in the later years of Elizabeth was that heard at her Court, and Hilda's harp and Isabel's sweet, wild voice were in frequent requisition. Gray-beards might look more gray ; anxious faces grow more anxious ; patriotic hearts, that had beat high, begin to feel an impatient throb ; spies, ever on the watch, might find only light and pleasant matter to report to their masters at the British Court : but what mattered that while the young and gay dashed grim Care for a little while aside, or, covering his old brow with rose-wreaths, made his threatening aspect only a fresh stimulus to their revelry ?

CHAPTER VII.

SIR GUY D'ESTERRE had sometimes put on a rather solemn face in the revelries alluded to, and, perhaps, more especially when he saw the Lord Lieutenant, whose impulsive disposition and well-known tastes caused him some uneasiness, devoting himself in a manner, more remarkable than usual, to the now radiant and happy Hilda Fitzclare. He had, nevertheless, entered into them, as others did ; and an order to depart on some military service to a distant part of the country was received in no very amiable mood by our gallant knight.

Was it Essex who gave the order, or desired it to be given ? Did he wish for the removal of that solemn countenance ? D'Es- terre was not given to suspicion, and he had,

in fact, no ground for suspecting his generous friend ; nevertheless, he had set off in a bad humour, and, as he continued in the same throughout the time of his absence, we shall only take him up at the moment of his return to Dublin Castle. His recall there had been urgent, and, whoever might have dictated his removal, was commanded by the Lord Lieutenant himself.

Amongst the first who greeted his arrival, as he rode into the Castle-yard, was his old friend, Major Anster, who followed him to his quarters, and, to his hasty inquiry for intelligence of what was passing, bluffly made reply—

“It were, belike, of other tidings than of councils of war, that end in nothing, of the making of new knights, and purchasing of new friends, that thou wouldst care to hear. I have not grown as gay a courtier as thou hast, Guy, though thou seekest a younger love than all other courtiers woo.”

“It is thyself, old friend, who hast taken that new turn, for truly thy head seemeth to run more on love matters than mine doth.”

“Ha ! my old head, mayhap, followeth the course of thy young heart.”

"Tell me, I pray you, what goes on here," said Guy. "I have had no tidings for a long season."

"Goes on, lad?—dances, and junketings, and Irish minstrelsy, are not so rife of late; and of what else should I tell thee?"

"Why, of councils of war, of making new knights, and purchasing new friends, of the which you spake but now. The Lieutenant has ordered me back. Are we to march northwards?"

"South,"—was the brief response.

"But surely both her Grace's instructions, and Essex's determination, were to proceed against O'Neil?"

"Yea: but that was before he landed on this enchanted soil, that turneth wise men mad, and changeth the counsels of princes into foolishness."

"What object," said D'Esterre, musingly, "can he set before himself in adopting such a course?"

"Hark ye, lad," whispered the old soldier, approaching him more closely—"two objects are before him, whether he see them or not—a scaffold and a throne!"

Sir Guy started : he looked at the grave, thoughtful eyes of the speaker, as if to read there the explanation of his words.

“And young Fitzclare?”—he said, following the track his thoughts rapidly took.

“Oh ! he is the white-headed boy, as the Irishry say of their favourites, though their heads be as dark as thine own, and as ancient as mine ; ever in attendance ; trusted with all secrets. Such madcap boys as that are right worthy counsellors and trusty liegemen !”

“I must report my arrival, good Anster,” said Guy, as an expression of pain gathered on his usually open and careless countenance, while he reflected on the many hints he had heard from the rash young man, whose desire, he knew, was to consolidate the various factions of his miserable land under one supreme chief, and whom he had, even before now, suspected of wishing to bring about a union between the Earl of Tyrone and the Lord Lieutenant.

His interview with the latter did not tend to allay his apprehensions as to the instability both of his position and his conduct. The angry letter of his imperious sovereign,

whose rage was excited by finding that Lord Southampton was made Master of the Horse contrary to her desire, had shown the Earl that the unlimited power apparently intrusted to him was only make-believe—well might it have been for himself had it also shown that such nominal power was, moreover, a decoy to lead on his ambitious, passionate temper to the acts his enemies expected and watched for. That temper had been irritated by the long, degrading servitude, in which his loving mistress had held him; and a mind naturally noble, frank, and generous, been warped from its better and higher impulses by the miserable deceit which he, as well as all her courtiers, had stooped to practise, in professing for the rather tyrannic old lady the passionate adoration which they would scarcely have breathed to a younger and fairer love: they were now again to be tried by the base arts set to work against him by pretended friends or hired spies; while the suggestions of others, who, like Morven Fitzclare, admired and loved him, and ardently desired the weal of their country, being guided by no steady principle, and directed

by no wise judgment, only caused the rocking boat to toss more and more on the uncertain, troubled sea on which it was so perilously launched.

The necessity of making friends for himself was felt by Essex, and inculcated by his advisers ; and it came to pass that, at the moment when that necessity was felt, the prospect of a rupture with a nobleman whom he had good reasons to suspect wished him no good, was unexpectedly brought before him.

The cause of this fresh disturbance was no other than Hilda Fitzclare, and the mover of it no other than her persecutor, Master Symonds.

Defeated at one point, that wily, mischief-making fortune-hunter had turned to another. His first purpose had been to ingratiate himself with the new Lord Lieutenant, as he had done with the late Marshal; but, the Fitzclares being in possession of his favour and confidence, he saw no hope for himself there, and at once turned his talents to account in the service of those persons who were either secretly or openly adverse to Essex. By this means he had already profited to a consider-

able extent, so that his fortune was largely advanced. His views, however, with respect to Hilda remained the same, and he managed to obtain his present patron's concurrence in them, by persuading him that his demand for the hand of the much admired maiden would exasperate, as that nobleman wished, the fiery temper of the Lord Lieutenant.

The claim made by Symonds for the fulfilment of a contract of marriage, and rejected by the lady with scorn, was brought before the Earl by the nobleman in question, and he was required, as her Majesty's representative, to compel the refractory lady to become the wife of the man she detested and despised.

In another case such an adjudication might have been less difficult; but this especial one was a cause of real perplexity to the Lord Lieutenant. One way of escape presented itself, and it, he fancied, the lady would accept. It was this scheme that caused the order for the return of Sir Guy D'Esterre, who was much surprised to find himself summoned to a council which, while not expressly of war, certainly partook of that character, oddly blended with that of love and marriage.

The despatch which had summoned him back bore an endorsement in the current style of the time—"For the good knight, Sir Guy D'Esterre. These, with speed. Ride, ride! for thy life! for thy life!" The charge or threat was not for him, but for the courier who bore the missive; yet he had ridden hard and well, and his quick arrival took his lord by surprise.

"Ha! so soon!" were his words. "By my troth, Guy, love lendeth wings, in sooth." And he then briefly and hastily unfolded to him the claims of Symonds, and the powerful interest by which they were supported; adding—

"We sent for thee, good knight, in order to prove for us a contract of marriage between thee and this fair Mistress Fitzclare, before the time from which this base varlet pretends that such was formed with him."

Guy had distended his eyes into a broad stare. Essex had learned in a Court of duplicity to school the expression of a naturally frank and open countenance; and D'Esterre, quite unused to such schooling, did not perceive any covert meaning in his words.

He believed that the Earl was under a mistaken impression as to the relation he held to Hilda, and, therefore, with a smile, but an involuntarily blushing brow, he answered—

“I am loath to thwart a purpose so kind to myself, my good Lord ; but no such contract has ever been formed by me with any lady, and assuredly not with the Lady Hilda.”

An angry flush darted over the Earl's countenance,—a corresponding exclamation broke from his lips. Sir Guy, with surprise and kindling wrath, saw something like contempt at the same time curl that lip ; but, controlling all such appearances, Essex answered, with indifference—

“Tush, man ! keep a better memory when the question is to serve thy friends and foil thy enemies. If thy mind hath changed since the time when thou went a-wooing to her father's castle, and brought thy neck into jeopardy for her fair sake, well trow I the lady hath too much pride, aye, and beauty too, to wish to hold thee fast to a contract that thou wert fain to forget. So hark ye, Guy, rub up thy memory a bit, and be in

the council-chamber at noon to-morrow, to urge, in the face of that lying caitiff, a pre-contract with the lady of thy love. Go, see her, good knight, and rid us of this fresh trouble."

Without waiting a reply, Essex passed from the door near which he had stood, and left Sir Guy in a sort of reverie, which lasted some minutes after he was alone.

There is something in the perverse and proud nature of man that renders even the accomplishment of his wishes, when apparently forced upon him, less agreeable, if not utterly distasteful. It is possible that Guy D'Esterre might, ere this, have known, and to one person at least, have owned, the love that was thus so often imputed to him; but the spirit of contradiction was as strong in him as in many others, and he generally felt more inclined to swim against the stream than with it.

One resolution was decidedly taken while he stood for those few minutes in meditation: it was, that he would not see Hilda Fitzclare before the noon of the morrow. If some little doubt of himself—of the con-

sequences that might arise from a compliance with the wish or command of the Earl, mingled with this resolution, he managed to conceal it from his own view by another line of reasoning.

“If Hilda,” he said in his thoughts, “really has, from any motive however specious, from any object or purpose, pledged herself to be the wedded wife of such a reptile as that Symonds is, hers is not the noble heart I fancied it to be. People talk of the self-sacrifices of women ! Hateful is the thought that pure-hearted woman can sacrifice herself on the altar where she vows her love to a man she cannot love !”

Thus coolly steeling his heart against any softer mood, Sir Guy resolved to seek no further information on the subject than the Earl had already briefly given him, and to wait upon him at noon the next day in precisely the same condition of mind, and with the same independent bearing, as he had just done.

The part he proposed to himself had been rapidly, but was also decidedly, determined on ; but at the same time the risk of altering it by reflection was avoided, and the even-

ing, which was drawing on, was spent with comrades who discussed other matters than those which, if alone, might have occupied his thoughts.

It was late when he retired ; the fatigue of a long and hasty ride, and, perhaps, some secret uneasiness, which he strenuously banished to the remotest corner of his heart, had caused him to drink more wine than he usually did : the consequences were, that he was saved the trouble of reflection by speedily falling asleep, and that sleep lasted till the morning was far advanced.

The appointed hour had passed, when, with some self-upbraiding, Sir Guy entered the council-chamber. Several persons, with Essex himself, were there ; but the object which his eye first caught, and on which it rested, while a keen sense of pain, almost of remorse, shot through his breast, was Hilda Fitzclare. Her face, and the hands which appeared beneath the folds of her dark mantle, were as pale, and looked as cold, as the whitest marble ; but an air of womanly pride was on her pure rounded brow, and her eyelids were so deeply drooped that they seemed

to close the eyes that never once looked up.

At the council-board, and before the Viceroy, stood her suitor, Symonds ; and near to Essex was the nobleman whose interests that man now served. Morven Fitzclare had been sent in search of his father, who, it was whispered, was absent on a mission to the leader of the northern rebels : and the girl sat there alone, like a stately prisoner on trial for life or death. A gold cross, studded with jewels fastened her mantle at the throat, and a veil, worn as the Spanish mantilla, partly shrouded her face, so that it was only when standing, as Guy did, opposite to her, that it was distinctly seen.

Symonds, with the look of the sly, watchful fiend, glancing his cold eye beneath the drawn-together lids, slowly, and with assumed composure, produced the alleged contract. It had been drawn by himself, and signed by O'Connor of Fitzclare, in the name of himself and his daughter.

" Were you, lady, a consenting party to this marriage contract ?" asked Essex, too sure that she had been driven to be so

through fear or family affection. His hope still clung to D'Esterre, whose evident emotion he perceived with no small satisfaction.

Slowly rose the statue-like form he addressed, and, as it did so, life seemed to be imparted to it,—the eyelids were lifted, and light appeared to be shed on the face, which a colour, more like the glow of indignation than the blush of maiden shame, flitted rapidly over : that form, to the fascinated gaze of Sir Guy, grew taller, and increased in dignity, as Hilda answered to the question of the Earl—

“Sorely has the house of my father suffered, and hardly has the heart of a father been pressed. But you, most noble Lord, ask if his daughter consented to the act to which he was driven. This is my answer :—Sooner than have consented to such a contract then,—sooner than descend to ratify it now,—that daughter would not only die a death of cruelest torture herself, but wish her father and brother to be safe with God, ere such an infamy had stained their name !”

“My own—my noble Hilda,” inwardly

gasped Sir Guy, whose suppressed breath made his heart to ache. He was too late in naming her, even mentally, his own ; and that, ere many minutes had gone by, he felt too well.

Heavy footsteps were heard, and O'Connor of Fitzclare stood before the Viceroy : his native dress, unclipped locks, gigantic size, and uncourtly movements, were all in striking contrast to the aspect of his child. Aware of the circumstance that summoned him there, and of the nature of the document that lay on the table before him, he abruptly stopped in his progress, and, pointing a finger to it, while his eyes fiercely rested on Symonds, he broke forth in a deep powerful voice, of such intense passion as diverted all thoughts from the speech that had just been uttered. In a torrent of words, the deep tone of which echoed through the chamber, he denounced the villany of Symonds, coupling therewith some of the iniquities practised by such hirelings and adventurers who swarmed over from England to aggravate the miseries of his land. Fiercely he upbraided the

cowering Symonds with the arts that had led him to sign the contract before them:—the fate of his son, over which he pretended to have power; the danger he had persuaded him he was threatened with from Sir Guy D'Esterre.

At this point the patron of Symonds and the secret foe of Essex interposed, and, showing that the passionate energy of the chieftain was expended to no purpose, while all he said kept wide of the mark, suggested that this acrimony was the natural result of the chieftain's wish to break the contract he had formed, and that neither himself nor his daughter had as yet given any evidence that the contract had not been really entered into. It was there stated in express terms that that contract should be fulfilled as soon as the chieftain's son, then detained prisoner in London, was set at liberty.

“By his means,” said the chieftain, pointing to Symonds.

“The words are not here,” that personage replied, bending as if to look for them.

They were not, indeed; they existed only in the meaning and intention of the chief,

who was too completely Irish to be very particular in seeing them set down in order on paper.

"A man of honour sees them," he uttered, with a scowl that his opponent would not like to meet in another place; "for one who hath no honour I have no speech."

Some parleying followed, in tones too suppressed to reach the ear of Guy, who stood at the lower end of the room, seen by Essex in consequence of his head being above most of those who intervened, yet too distant to hear what was not spoken in clear and audible voices. He was, therefore, somewhat startled when the commanding voice of the Lord Lieutenant sounded out the summons,

"Stand forth, Sir Guy D'Esterre!"

"Hah!" cried Symonds and his noble patron together, "the case is thus cleared. Our gracious Viceroy finds another claimant for the prize; the lady breaks her faith, and the father sacrifices his honour in favour of the noble lord's follower."

Essex's frowning brow and threatening gesture produced an instant silence; and, turning to Guy, whose eyes vainly sought

those of the now trembling Hilda, he demanded of him whether a pre-contract had not existed between himself and the chieftain's daughter, which set aside that brought forward by Symonds.

Gladly would Guy have affirmatively answered, and proudly would he have led out the fair sufferer from a position so painful. Truth was a virtue dear to him, yet it was with an effort felt rather than displayed that he answered—"No, so please you, my Lord, it has not been my fortune to be so favoured!"

On this stepped forth the chieftain, and, drawing his sword, struck it through the paper that had been laid on the table, driving it up to the hilt.

"When that contract is fulfilled," said he, in a voice of hollow calmness, "so deep shall this sword lie in the body of him who would then call himself the husband of my child. I swear it by all I hold dear:—and the word of O'Connor of Fitzclare, thus pledged to a foeman, hath never been broken!"

The threat was enough for the dastardly Symonds; but with a sneer he tried to cover his retreat by an affected resignation of the

lady to the object of her choice. With a look of detestation and scorn, the chieftain turned from him, and, striding to the chair of Essex—

“Hear me, my Lord of Essex,” he cried, “and hear all ye who think it a merry pastime to insult the keenest feelings of a woman’s heart. Deem ye that *she* would wed with the Saxon?—with the foe of her house and her country? Deem ye that—his late madness over—her father would suffer it?”

Then, raising his great right arm to its utmost stretch, he swore an oath, deep and awful, that never should such a union with a Saxon take place while he had life to prevent it.

A vast dark cloud seemed to descend before the eyes of Sir Guy D’Esterre, and close up the world and all its prospects—life, with its cares, hopes, joys or sorrows—all seemed to vanish in that darkness. It was a blank, a positive blank, he saw before him; and yet he stood gazing intently on the shrouded form of Hilda Fitzclare. She had long before drawn her veil closely round her, and her face no one saw. As her fa-

ther's arm dropped down, he threw it round her, and half lifting her from her seat, bore her hurriedly from the room.

Still Sir Guy stood gazing on the same spot, unconscious that he alone remained looking upon it, until a hand clapped on his shoulder made him start violently.

"Give you joy, good knight, and you must return us the same gratulation," said the Earl, who appeared more content than others with the turn affairs had taken. "We should have had more trouble on our hands, after all, if you had confessed to the pre-contract we wanted you to plead. You are free now, at all events, and no fear of a contract again in that quarter."

"Hilda!" said Guy to himself, as he walked with solemn, measured step, as if following a funeral, across the Castle-yard, "I have lost thee; and now I know how dear thou art!"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not long before Hilda also knew, at least as well as words could explain it, the fact of which Sir Guy had become cognisant. Such knowledge is, indeed, seldom long confined to any one breast. And so Guy D'Esterre and his sometime warder came to know that they loved, and deeply loved, just when they likewise knew that their love was hopeless.

This occurred when the troops were ordered to march into Munster, to which province the Lord Lieutenant astonished his best friends, and delighted his worst foes, by announcing his intention to proceed, instead of pursuing the Queen's instructions, and his own previously expressed determination, to advance into Ulster, and act against O'Neil.

“North or south,” said bluff old Anster, “let the Queen say north, and her Lieutenant will say south.” And so, to all appearance, it was; but then secret springs were at work, of which the honest, straightforward soldier knew nothing; and in the multitude of counsellors the unfortunate Earl found anything but wisdom.

Spies and informers had been commissioned, and sent with him from the Court that empowered him as its Viceroy. Of necessity they must do something for their pay, and the counsel on which he acted was easily represented by them as the perverse, ambitious, or designing dictates of his own brain.

Among those who were most disappointed by the march to the south was Morven Fitzclare, who had fondly looked forward to a meeting between the English and Irish chiefs as the forerunner of that coalition of which he had dreamed.

Other disappointments occupied the mind of his comrade, Sir Guy D'Esterre. A cloud had, indeed, descended over them all; a

mist that was but the forerunner of the thick vapour that was looming in the distance.

The little fire-fly, as Morven called his child-like love, the fairy Isabel, tried in vain to laugh, sing, or dance it away.—True, she found light wherever her young lover was, and therefore she shed a portion of the light she herself received around them both; but he was really too much abstracted in his own visionary schemes to devote himself to her: a few minutes of wild frolic were often abruptly ended in a seemingly rude or impatient manner, that left the poor maiden in tears, to complain that Morven was growing like an old man, and treated her as a child.

It was during one of those intervals of noise, that often occurred between those of tears and pouting, that, within the alcove of the same large apartment, and concealed in the recess of the deep window, a graver and more equable pair stood, apparently looking very earnestly into the empty court beneath that window.

“Ah! Hilda,” said Sir Guy, “had I spo-

ken earlier, would thy answer have been the same?"

"No," she made reply, with deeply declined eyelids, but in a firm, unhesitating voice.

A fervent kiss on the hand he held responded; the knight, stout as he was, had no voice just then.

"Is there not, then, hope for me?" he said afterwards.

"Hope! Oh! there is hope for thee, hope on all sides: an honourable, well-spent life—God's peace at its close!"

"But without love?"

She lifted her eyes, and then, in a sweet, sad smile, spoke to him, as those eyes often did without words, in a low tone, adding—

"Thou wilt find another love."

"Never!" he cried in answer; "never! I vow——"

With a playful mournfulness, she laid her hand on his lips.

"Beware of a rash vow; do we not suffer from one?"

The question broke away the last particle of Sir Guy's self-restraint; his passionate

nature was roused, and poured itself out at Hilda's feet.

Faint and pale, she drew back, and stood some moments with her face bowed upon both her outstretched hands. He waited, with a thrill of hope at his heart—silent, and thinking, when the hands were removed, that beautiful face would glow with the loveliest of blushes. They came down at last, but the face he gazed on was paler than before.

“We must not meet thus again, Sir Guy,” she said; “neither must such words pass between us any more. But ere we part, I will tell thee this. Had our faith been pledged to each other before my father uttered the fearful oath that has separated us, I would have kept it as solemnly as I now believe he ought to keep his. That oath must now be kept, and never from me shall my father learn what would take from his life the little happiness it possesses.”

“And for thine own life, sweet Hilda—thine own happiness?”

“The hopes of heaven must make the

happiness of earth," she answered, holding to him her hand. "Henceforth, we must not meet again; or, if the sad mischances of life, which ever prevent me from following what women," she added, with a sad smile, "love to follow—their own will and fancy—if such mischances should prevent me from soon quitting this land of strife and crime,—Sir Guy, if we meet again, I promise, as truly as my father keeps his oath—to speak with thee no more!"

"Hilda! Hilda! speak not thus!" he cried, casting himself before her, "say, even, for thy father's life—that word will not bid hope to be no more!"

"And were I to say that," said Hilda, trembling from head to foot, "were I to leave such a loophole for hope—O Heaven, pardon me the thought! might I not even wish that that life were ended? And for thee," she continued, withdrawing the hand he held passionately to his heart, "for thy sake also, wherefore should I do such wrong? It were to cause thee to linger out a life—its prime years, at least—in vain expectancy. No, Sir Guy, there is

another life before thee—another, too, before her you have vainly, and too late, learned to love.”

“Vainly, it may be; too late, it shall not be,” he exclaimed, with an angry bitterness such words as hers did not warrant.

“Farewell, Sir Guy,” she replied; “good, brave, honest, Guy,—fare-thee-well: it has been the lot of our house to work thee pain and care, be it now for me to make thee what atonement my poor prayers can yield. Prayer will now be my solace; thou wilt bethink thee of that in the hour of danger and strife, and sometimes——” She stopped, for words could not come; a large tear rolled down; and, plucking her hand from his grasp, Hilda Fitzclare vanished from his sight: nor did she reappear to it, though daily he resorted to the same house and spot, and daily and hourly watched for her, and unavailingly questioned the younger and gayer lovers whose April-sky sort of love, made up of sunshine, cloud, and tears, became positively offensive to our fastidious knight.

But within another recess in that old, cu-

rious apartment, O'Connor of Fitzclare had been all the time a listener, and observer of what had passed. For the first time he learned—what he had not even suspected before—that he had destroyed the happiness of his child. In a nature so calm and deep as hers, the love that had crept into it was not lightly manifested, nor was it ever to be eradicated. As she left the room, the chieftain raised his huge clasped hands above his head, and said—

“The avenger of blood is at hand—the curse of the widow and fatherless at the cursing-stone shall be fulfilled!”

CHAPTER IX.

SOME short time had passed, and Sir Guy D'Esterre, removed from his vicinity to the object of his deep and steady love, had been placed in scenes the very opposite to those of love and pleasure.

The army, meanwhile, had departed with its gallant, but misled, chief into the province of Munster. Left to himself, the chivalrous spirit and generous temper of the Earl of Essex might have effected the object he desired, but daily felt more unable to perform—the pacification of a distracted and unhappy land; but, encompassed by false friends or secret foes, by hiring spies and advisers, with whom motives of self-interest were more weighty than those of high principle, his intentions were frustrated; his

mind bewildered ; the good that he meant became turned to evil ; and the doom to which that unhappy land appeared ever to consign those who visited it seemed to be falling on the head of its ruler.

Too long the victim of his own passions to be able clearly to see, and resolutely to follow, the straight and narrow path of rectitude and honour, or too long accustomed to brave the formidable power of a sovereign whose feminine weakness had, unfortunately, been at least as well known to him as her masculine greatness, he acted in implicit faith on the reality of the extraordinary powers intrusted to him ; and "the weary knight," as he had been styled during his thralldom at Court, was now only too well disposed to use the freedom he had gained.

Bright and gay was the cavalcade in which young Morven Fitzclare rode forth on that summer day in the train of his Lord. But sad was that wild young heart ; and the usually excitable, changeful face that appeared beneath the nodding plumes of his casque was clouded with a gloom far greater than that it ever had worn in his prison days.

He was in arms among those he looked on as the enemies of his country. His compact with Essex saved him from fighting against his own people ; but his service required his attendance on the Earl. His own views were foiled, for the present at least ; and while he was as true as ever to what he called the interests and liberties of his country, he was, to all appearance, serving the adverse cause.

Unvexed by such thoughts, little Isabel watched his splendid plume, his shining corslet ; and, waving her adieux, only wished he were safe back with her again. But as she gazed out at her young, depressed lover from the window beneath which he rode, her brightly glancing eye fell on another form : —it was the singular one of the man called Lawrence, whom she had frequently seen at the chieftain's fort. His face made her shudder.

“ Surely,” she said to herself, “ he regards Morven with an evil eye : no one, methinks, could wish him ill, yet that fellow eyes him as if he knew he were now marching to death. O Heaven ! shield him !” cried the maiden, pressing her small finger-tips on the spark-

ling, dewy eyes, and passing from the tumult of other sensations into the excess of fear and sorrow. "Ah ! if Hilda were here, she would counsel me, for well I know some mischief is at work. She would come with me, and we would set off and follow him, and save him as we did before,"—the loving child continued ; for she had contrived to assure herself, as well as Morven, that his release and safety were wholly owing to the pilgrimage made on his behalf.

It was Lawrence she saw : and he was beholding at that moment the approaching accomplishment of his wicked vow. Rendered miserable by the blood that had been shed by her relatives, her husband and sons, his mother had made him, in his early boyhood, swear never by his own hand to shed blood or take life ; and when she afterwards caused him to swear, at the cursing-stone, to pursue and destroy the chieftain and his sons, it was with the stipulation that his first vow was to be kept, and other hands or means of vengeance employed.

But, besides this cause of delay in the accomplishment of the purpose to which

he had been cruelly devoted, there had latterly been another in operation—conscience had awakened, and the ignorance that had put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that had called evil good, and good evil, had been painfully broken in upon by the beams of truth which the high-minded daughter of the doomed chieftain had flashed on his benighted soul.

Like a hermit of the desert, he had lived in penance for what he foolishly believed to be his fault, for such he accounted his doubt and hesitation to be. In silence and solitude the tempter was more powerful than he, for he sought not for the true strength ; so he had come forth again, bewildered in error, doubtful of purpose.

The chieftain had always been in the North, and more or less with O'Neil, since his son's return. O'Neil was now the champion of religion ; a circumstance that would not have set aside such a vow of revenge as he had been brought under, but, in his present state, it gave an excuse for delaying its accomplishment.

Such had been his miserable wavering

until, goaded by the perverted conscience that urged him to perform a sinful vow, and warned against it by the purer instinct that still remained uncorrupt within him, he came to the capital quite in a frame of mind to interpret as omens the slightest accidents that might occur to move the balance of his mind.

He met in full array the army of Essex, and in its forefront rode the young chief, in Saxon dress and armour.

"It is, so far, done without trouble," thought Lawrence. "Let but his kinsfolk see him thus in arms, and his fate is sealed. But not without my hand—though the blow be not struck by me, it must be guided by me!"

It was at the moment that these words distinctly formed themselves in his heart, that Isabel, unseen, caught the glance he cast upon her already depressed and moody lover. Morven seemed to go forth sealed to his death, by his own anticipations, and the vengeful eye of his father's late follower. But, one thing was needful to give to the latter the merit he desired:—that was to

inform O'Connor's outraged relative, O'More, that his son bore arms in the Saxon service. On this errand he speedily set forth, and the issue of this mission will be seen in the sequel of our narrative.

Sir Guy D'Esterre, with a small garrison, occupied a castle from which the followers of the chieftain O'Rourke had been dislodged, in the province of Munster : and when we follow him there, he sat drearily enough in a room of that castle, having for his sole companion a bottle of Portuguese wine, which he had been so fortunate as to obtain from the old city of Waterford—for, though D'Esterre might, undoubtedly, be said to be temperate in all things—he did, at that moment, find a certain consolation in the prime juice of the grape, more especially because it afforded so peculiar a contrast to the nature of the food he was forced to consume.*

A young trooper, with a twinkle in his eye that was rather displeasing to the gravity of our knight, appeared at the door, to in-

* Sir John Harrington complained that he was forced to eat horseflesh when with Essex in Munster.

form him that a young maiden of the "Irish sort" desired speech with him.

Guy started, as the thought of Hilda Fitzclare presented itself: but well he knew by the fellow's countenance it could not have been such a face as hers he had seen.

He rose, and passed him without a word, going down to the Court to meet the visitor, instead of, as the man expected, having her conducted to him.

Mounted on a pretty jennet, he saw a figure wholly enveloped in a large mantle, the hood of which projected far over the head; and was held by one invisible hand beneath the chin, mantilla fashion. Not a bit of the face was to be seen, for the audacious glance of the young trooper had caused it to cower under its shelter as timidly as the snail into its shell. But a tell-tale tress of long bright hair fell down so low that the wide hood failed to conceal it, and our knight, laying one hand on the saddle, said—

"Fair mistress Isabel, to what good chance owe I this rare favour?"

"Ah! Sir Guy—Sir Guy—help me—

help me !” almost sobbed the young girl, whose little form shook all over with fear or emotion. Guy would have been a good knight in the olden time—a time olden even in the days of “good Queen Bess”—when devotion to God, loyalty to a lady-love, and the chivalrous protection of all distressed dames, constituted the character of such a personage.

“Help thee, sweet maiden? that will I most heartily: say but who hath dared to wrong thee !”

“Alack! that is not it,” cried Isabel, swathing her face so entirely in the great hood that the little glimpse he had had of a glowing cheek was quite lost, “I want thee, Sir Guy, I want thee—to help me——”

“To what, fair mistress?”

“To find Morven,” whispered Isabel, while confusion and timidity, more than grief, actually forced a tear down her painfully suffused cheek.

With difficulty Guy repressed the loud laugh that was bursting forth: as it was, a gurgling sound told her right well what was the effect her petition produced.

Ashamed of his ungallant demeanour, he forcibly, though with a smothering sensation, restrained the explosion.

"Sooth to say, the task will be a light one for me to perform," he answered, bowing gravely to her, "and I only would it were more weighty. I am under orders to proceed forthwith to join my Lord Essex, who hath marched towards Cork ; there I shall, doubtless, find Morven with him, and will, I swear, prove myself a faithful Mercury."

"Nay, nay, that will not do, sir knight—thou must take me to him. He will not listen to thee. No one can save him but myself!"

The tone of increased assurance with which she spoke removed Guy's levity ; and, convinced there was some real cause for her anxiety, he listened with interest, while, as she still sat on her horse, and he leaned on its saddle, she related what that cause was.

She told him how, while Symonds had remained at the island fort, he had, as we have before seen, sought many opportunities

of conversing with her, and related to her, as he had also related to the chieftain, the entire history of the wretched man who went by the name of Lawrence. Symonds had already gained some merit in the opinion of the easily deceived chief by the same disclosure, which he pretended to be the result merely of his own sagacity and keen pursuit of information ; instead of being, in fact, the result of a fear that his late associate would betray him. He had inspired Isabel, however, with a dread, a terror of Lawrence, which he utterly failed to impress either on the chieftain or his daughter. Hilda's mind was too lofty for suspicion, or for the haunting fears it engenders ; her father's was too inconsiderate ; but on Isabel's lively imagination and loving little heart, Symonds had contrived to make an impression concerning Morven's danger and his own powers to avert it, sufficiently strong to induce her even to second, by all her childish efforts, his designs for obtaining the hand of Hilda. All this, during their recent time of peace and gaiety, had been unthought of, until the dark countenance of

the vengeful Lawrence had recalled her fears so painfully to her mind, as she saw it lour on her young and brilliantly equipped hero.

Carefully, and with both energy and wit, she had watched the dark being whose face seemed to her the very prophet of ill. She had employed an active agent also to do so, and had traced Lawrence first to the fortress where the chieftain then was, and, on the following day, to the mountain fastness of the outlawed O'More.

His visit to the latter chief had been detailed by Morven to his family, and the threat of O'More, in case he met the youth in the field on the Saxon side, was known both to his father and his childish lady-love.

Having possessed herself of all of this information, and reasoned upon it, Isabel drew the wise deduction therefrom, that her lover's life was in danger, and she alone was destined to save him. She must keep him from the very semblance of appearing in arms, since, in consequence of his first compact with the Lord Lieutenant, he was not to use them against his own people; Essex

should listen to her, and command, if solicitation failed.

But how to follow, how to reach him, was the question. She would make out some means to do both, for the old saying, "where there's a will there's a way," was fully exemplified by her in carrying out the inspirations of her young love. However, while deliberating on sundry schemes, the image of Sir Guy D'Esterre always rose before her as that of the brave, courteous, and honourable knight to whom a distressed damsel might with all maidenly modesty repair. And, taking a single attendant to be both her guard and guide, the fair child mounted the pretty horse, of which the land had few such to boast, and set forth as pure in heart as the lovely Una of whom sweet Edmund Spenser had just been singing, to assail the stout heart of our knight in the forlorn old castle he so discontentedly guarded.

By good chance the order for his departure from it had arrived, otherwise military duty might have opposed an obstacle that could not have yielded even to the service of

Cupid. As it happened, Sir Guy was able, after having left the wandering damsel to take some hours' rest with a decent matron in the vicinity, to mount his horse, and, attended by a couple of men-at-arms, set forth by her side to escort her with all due honour upon her way.

Bashful, blushing without knowing why, or immersed in her own gently sad reveries, Isabel was not at first a companion likely to beguile its dreariness. A desolated country, a famine-stricken people—whose fearful aspect then, in the sixteenth century, has been unhappily, as it were, resuscitated in the nineteenth—presented only gloomy matter of reflection to him. The effects of the frightful time, long known in unhappy Ireland as “The Hag’s War,” were everywhere visible. But the pages of Edmund Spenser and other writers relieve our lighter narrative of such fearful descriptions. It was, as he relieved from the contents of an often emptied purse one of the miserable objects who perpetually and loudly claimed relief, declaring, in language only understood by his companion, that charity had been driven from the land, that

D'Esterre felt most keenly the cruel results of the rapacity that had despoiled the religious houses of charity, and involved the practically and laboriously useful in the fate of the corrupt or useless.

The consequences of such spoliation were already felt in England, and had given rise to a compulsory tax as a substitute for voluntary or religious benevolence: the Poor-law system, as we have it now in monster operation, having been the production, originally, of the clever brains that assisted the councils of Queen Elizabeth. No substitute, however, could be found to alleviate the loss and wretchedness of Ireland. War and famine added their fearful scourge to internal rapine: the miserable natives—their naked figures far more frightful than bony skeletons, with eyes staring with the weakness of famine, with arms stretched out, whose shrivelled thinness made them seem of double length—came crawling from their doors, indifferent whether it were friend or enemy who passed, so as they flung them a morsel to relieve the pangs of hunger.

“To think,” said Guy, as he found he was in danger of disembarassing himself of

his last silver piece,—“to think that this land, so wasted with misery, was once the Isle of Saints—the seat of learning and piety; but that was ere the Pope held sway here.”

“Or the Saxons,” retorted Isabel.

“I marvel does your St. Bridget behold it now. If so, she must no longer be the protectress of the poor,” he replied.

“Ah! there is only one saint in our new calendar whose festival is still held with honour,” said the little lady, with so much gravity that her companion, quite dull in apprehension, and not suspecting her of having any sarcasm in her disposition, inquired—

“What saint may that be, fair mistress?”

“Saint Elizabeth—the only saint we all may, if we please, worship now!”*

* That worldly-wise great man, Lord Burleigh, has left us, in one of his epistles, a saying indicative of a time when language that would have been impious if addressed to the old-fashioned saints was commonly used to the great Elizabeth—“To serve God,” he says, “is to serve the Queen.”

A curious instance of the state of religious feeling is alluded to above. The Pope forbade the observance of St. Elizabeth's day. The *Queen* of England caused

"I pray you, lady, for the sake of pity, and if it please you, let us mend our pace," Guy quickly responded, "I have no chance else but to be beggared outright."

She drew up : like a pretty page yielding to his knight's behest, she bent her head almost to the saddle-bow with a make-believe reverence, and, shaking loose her rein, her jennet bounded off, speedily distancing her somewhat astonished escort, who was forced to put his stronger horse to its speed to overtake her ; which it did only when she, drawing rein and breath together, turned back her rose-leaf-glowing face, only partly seen through her bright, dishevelled hair, challenging him to a regular race with an air so prettily, yet still childishly coquetish, that our good knight, who, in a rather unorthodox state of feeling, had in his own mind been meditating something like a crusade against "the Lady of Poverty" to whom St. Francis in vision betrothed himself, was cheated out of his gravity; and in the merry

or permitted it to be celebrated as her own, having, as a writer of the day silyly remarks, the power of canonizing herself.

courses that followed, he might well have imagined that the versatile, light-hearted child mistook him for the wild young lover to whose rescue she was hastening. But if such a presumptuous thought had entered his brain, it would have been far from the truth. In fact, had the poet of Ireland lived then who wrote these words, Sir Guy might have sung them :—

“ In England the garden of Beauty is kept
By a dragon of Prudery plac'd within call ;
But so oft this unamiable dragon has slept,
That the garden's but carelessly watch'd after all.
Oh ! they want the wild sweet-briery fence
Which round the flowers of Erin dwells ;
Which warns the touch, while winning the sense,
Nor charms us least when it most repels.”

His biographer's memory, however, suggests the verses he might have found in unison with its thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

THE brightest days, in all senses, must have a close, and the sun, that had almost scorched our young equestrians, was suddenly overcast, and set in mist, which soon fell in such unremitting rain as the skies of Ireland know how to pour.

Concern for his merry little companion made Sir Guy eager to find shelter, but they had yet some distance to ride before they came to a house where they could venture to seek for hospitality. Suddenly she darted as before from his side, and rode forward as rapidly as her now tired steed could bear her. He soon spied a lowly house, whose walls seemed enveloped in the smoke that oozed from them: at its door Isabel dropped down from her seat, and, throwing her rein

on the animal's neck, ran into it before he could reach her.

Doubting her prudence in doing so, he called his two troopers to come on, and hastened after her.

Already the little maiden was divested of her wet mantle ; and, with her long fair hair flowing down to dry, stood at the blazing wood-fire, in the hands of a good woman, who, in the phraseology of the day, would be said to have been "of the baser sort," but who, to Sir Guy's surprise, proved to be no other than his yellow-headed attendant of former days, the faithful Canna, who, unable to witness the alliance of her foster-children with the strangers, had come there to die, as she said, "among her own people." Isabel knew where her house was, and had, while enjoying her knight's perplexity, depended on passing the hours of darkness there. In a few brief and hurried words she had told her hostess the cause of her visit, and engaged her to give quarters—though very grudgingly—to the Saxon officer and his men.

Fire and a prospect of food were consola-

tory to the latter, for their captain was ravenously hungry, and it may be supposed they were equally so. After seeing to the horses, he ordered them to an outer dwelling, where supper was promised them ; and thus his easy duties performed, Guy began to enjoy such pleasure as a wet and weary traveller might feel in a warm hostelry, with the brightest and most Hebe-like of handmaidens acting as the interpreter of his wants and wishes to the more grim-visaged hostess.

A disturbance of such comfort was threatened : sounds of horses' feet were heard approaching : they stopped at the door : a loud, deep voice, speaking in Irish, caused Isabel to start from her seat like a frightened culprit, while another voice made her knight's heart to bound, and then to stand still, as he held his breath to catch its accents. They were not long in doubt ; the door flew open, and the great form of O'Connor of Fitzclare entered through it, followed by the tall, slender, and closely enveloped one of his daughter.

The club, O'Connor's only weapon, and

one memorable in the history of Sir Guy D'Esterre, was struck loudly on the clayey floor : but the chieftain, with widely opened eyes, regarded in silence an apparition that was evidently unexpected. His looks and surprise at once relieved poor Isabel, who had believed she was the object of pursuit : but, like the shifting of the breeze, her fears took another direction, and her anxious eye, glancing from Sir Guy to Hilda Fitzclare, and from Hilda back to Sir Guy, might have told them both the nature of that silly fear.

There was no room in such a mind as Hilda's for such a thought as had quickly entered hers. If love ever dwelt in Hilda's heart, it must be love that could know no jealousy, for its object could give cause for none.

Yet when she entered that fire-illumined room, and saw there Guy and Isabel making themselves as happy and comfortable as possible, there was a slight start, a slight receding of the form, that visibly shook with sudden tremor ; and when a single step placed her wholly devoted lover at her side, and his low voice spoke her name, she only more

closely enveloped her shrouded head, and silently drew nearer to her father's side.

Why?—because she had promised not to see, not to speak to him again. No pettish jealousy assailed her breast.

Sir Guy did not ever fancy it did ; as far was the thought from his imagination as from hers. But Isabel tenderly felt how much she would dislike to find her Morven in such a case ; and so she stole round, like a little gliding spirit, and, getting in between the two, reached up her round white arms to Hilda's neck, and, hiding her face in her bosom, whispered, half audibly—

“It is my fault.”

Hilda only half suspected, yet wholly felt her meaning ; for the words, which Guy also heard, drew a lightning flash over the countenance, which her disarranged head-gear, as she released herself from Isabel, allowed him to see. He felt the deep, glowing blush penetrate to his heart, for its language was dear.

“Hilda !” he said again ; and the tone thrilled to hers. She raised her eyes ; and, as they had ever done, they spoke to him, but her lips did not move.

“She will keep her promise,” he murmured : and stamped his heel on the floor, as she quietly moved on to where her father stood, erect and motionless, before the blazing logs.

Isabel had previously gained the other side, believing, by the inspiration of her own heart, that Sir Guy and Hilda would satisfy the claims of jealousy far better without her interference ; and she was already accounting to the chieftain for the singularity of her progress in company with the Saxon knight. The chieftain listened with singular—it might appear uncalled-for—interest to what was, indeed, on her part, rather an exculpatory harangue than a full explanation of what had occurred.

Resting his staff, or, as we have hitherto termed it, club, on the floor, he leaned his broad hands upon it, and bent forward in earnest thought ; the fire-light, gleaming on his face, over which the long cherished locks still wildly hung, gave it an air of melancholy sublimity, as, looking forward, he raised his head as she concluded, and said—

“It is so—the warning has not been in

vain. Let one life suffice—and let it be mine. Amen.”

He moved his lips inaudibly, signing the sign of the Cross.

“My father!” said Hilda, whisperingly, for her voice could not come forth, “thou saidst that here I should learn what this emotion of thine may portend. Tell thy child, I pray thee—thy children, rather,” she added, passing her arm round Isabel, who, terrified at the chieftain’s mood, crept round to her; and, pressing her lips on her fair forehead, she freed the little trembler from one fear, just as another took its place.

“The Banshee cried ere-yester-night,” said O’Connor of Fitzclare. “You think, mavourneen, it is to see you safe from this land of blood I guide you round to the coast. No, astore: the ship is there, but it will not bear thee away, Hilda, for another fate is before thee. The Banshee cried—I saw it, heard it, too!”

“She shall not die,” shrieked Isabel, casting her tiny arms round the moveless Hilda. “Father,” as she, too, called the chieftain—“thou must not, dare not, say so!”

"Peace! peace! little one!" he sternly answered. "What I say, I say; let those understand it who can. Ere-yester-eve I came at dusk to the water's edge; I saw the Banshee, a little aged woman in a long mantle, flit before me, wailing in a bitter voice. At night, as I lay on my bed, there came a voice that I knew: it was a voice from the grave; it told me my name and house should perish,—it rang in my ear the words that had been said to me in the days of my hot youth. It told me ere many days I should be childless!"

A pang, the forerunner of one he was more keenly to experience, crossed Sir Guy D'Esterre's breast; but, recovering himself, he exclaimed that this was but an imposture, the device, probably, of the villain Lawrence.

"Nay," said O'Connor, "it was no mortal voice,—that I know. The curse shall be fulfilled."

"If it bear us nearer to Heaven, my father, may it not be rather a blessing?" asked Hilda, as, drawing him to a seat, she took one on the same bench, and leaned her pale, lovely cheek on his giant breast. His

arm encircled her; and as the contrasted pair sat thus, the warm blaze flushed Hilda's face with an artificial glow, and made it "beautiful exceedingly."

She cast off her mantle, and her damp thick veil: her black, luxuriant hair fell at full length almost to her knees, and the golden band that had bound it sparkled in the light that played on her brow.

With a feeling of spite, Sir Guy observed that the prospect of soon passing away, not only from her troubled country, but from the world itself, gave her little real pain; but a sense of foreboding melancholy took possession of his mind, and made his heart to ache.

The next morning he set forth with his two troopers, having been obliged to yield his blithesome little companion to the chieftain's protection, who kindly, yet positively, declined his escort, and affirmed that their routes were different.

CHAPTER XI.

WE do not intend to follow the progress of the Earl of Essex through Munster.

D'Esterre rejoined the army of the Lord Lieutenant to partake its distresses rather more than its glories. At "the Pass of Plumes," long so named in the Irish language from the large quantity of that gay ornament which the gallantly equipped troops of Essex lost in a disastrous encounter with the natives, our knight had the good fortune not to be. But during the fatal expedition of the Earl to Munster, he beheld, with grief and mortification, an army capable of performing better service wasted away by famine and sickness, destroyed in miserable skirmishes, or exposed to absolute slaughter by the ambuscades of an enemy

who were more formidable in such modes of attack than in regular battle.

The country, then more thickly wooded than now, afforded the natives abundant places of shelter ; not only the woods and narrow passes, but the bogs also, yielded their hiding-places to men who stood buried to the neck, holding their arms above the water or mire, and ready to pour out on the careless troops who marched by in false security.

The climate, humid from undrained lands and uncultivated woods, added its influence to the disasters of the British, and the total want of provisions in a district already wasted by famine, and unwilling to yield what supply it might have afforded, crowned these miseries, and disease soon appeared in the army of Essex ; — an enemy the gallant Lord was as unable to deal with as he was, perhaps, really unwilling to act against the miserable people he had been commissioned to subdue.

Sir Guy, with a detachment of the horse, had been sent against the chieftain O'Rourke :

his charge having been successfully performed, he was now endeavouring to rejoin the Earl, who had advanced from the city of Limerick, meaning to march by the coast toward the capital.

A splendid monastery, left to decay, offered a halting-place to his troop, and after a brief repose he left it in their possession, and strolled to a little distance, lost in wonder at the wild beauty of the scenery. He had come into the immediate vicinity of a spot whose solitary and pensive charms have only of later years come to be known and visited,—the Lakes of Killarney;—for in the sixteenth century those lakes were there, as lovely, as mournful, as tree and rock-encircled, as they are to-day, as they at that time had been since the heaving earth had thrown up their guardian barriers, and Nature, pleasing herself the most where she is least seen by man, had clothed them in her stately and flowery garments.

Insensibly drawn on by the deep stillness, the unexpected wonders of the wildly beautiful scenery that opened before his slowly advancing footsteps, Sir Guy, a lover of nature

and of country life, ascended the rocks, and, satisfied that his men were securely posted, forgot that he was risking his own safety by adventuring himself in a spot so lonely, and so likely to be made the fastness of outlaws and rebels. He climbed the rocky bank, and gazed with rapture on scenes now made the subject of legendary lore. Almost came the thought starting to his mind, that in such scenes, with Hilda Fitzclare for his companion, he could be content to lead a hermit life !

Could this be the land of blood and crime ; of outrage and wrong ?—he thought. Could Religion ever lend her hallowed name to ungodly strife, even where the visible works of God preached aloud a higher and nobler lesson ?

There was a smile of peace on the soft, twilight-shaded bosom of the lake, over which the retiring sunlight just gleamed, faint and fitful, bright and fading ; in unison with the character of scenery that is itself, to an imaginative fancy, in unison with the character of the land and its people.

All at once a boat crossed the line of sun-

light, and broke it into many scattered and rippling sparkles ; and, at the instant, a stealthy footstep approached, cautiously stealing round the rock on which he stood. Unheeding the boat and its progress, Guy drew his sword, and stood on guard, counting on an immediate attack : but the object that came in view gave no cause for fear, and, looking rapidly round, he could see no other person.

It was a man whose cadaverous aspect and attire struck him as being more like what would be the result of voluntary penance than of the poverty and starvation so generally seen, who came quickly, but with a cautious, and often hesitating pace, to the lower part of the same rocks he stood on.

The rattle of the weapon, as the knight drew it from its sheath, startled this man, who, holding back his step, gazed round with terror in his looks. That expression changed, as soon as he perceived Sir Guy, to one almost of joy,—one that spoke of mental relief. Checking speech from him by a rapid cautionary movement, he as quickly crossed himself several times, his lips mut-

tering an inaudible prayer. In this interval Guy had convinced himself that he was that Lawrence who had been mixed up with most of his adventures in Ireland, and was also satisfied that the wretched man was not now in his right senses : but that he might be dangerous still, he well knew.

The prayer of thanksgiving ended in less than a minute, and then the man, pointing with eager rapidity to the boat, that was nearing the bank, pointed again to a pile of rock not far from it, and by signs quickly informed him that the persons in that boat were in danger from others, who lay in wait behind the rock. Not inclining to risk his life in the savage frays so common among a factious and disunited people, Guy was on the point of putting up his sword, and turning away from the spot, when, looking again to the boat, to see if aid on the weaker side might be wanted, he distinctly, and with some dismay, beheld the large person of O'Connor of Fitzclare step from it, and lift that of his daughter to the bank, up which the agile Isabel lightly bounded.

One spring placed him at the side of the traitor, whose neck he grasped ; but with a jerk, more powerful than he was prepared for from a frame so emaciated, Lawrence wrenched himself away, and in a low, hoarse voice, uttered one word—" Fool !"

" Hush !" he added, as Guy was about to speak ; " Symonds is yonder with hired murderers—but now I heard from my cavern their talk : they have tracked O'Connor and his daughter, and lie in wait for them."

" Pah !" said Guy, startled, nevertheless, into a suspicion that the tale was true, " know I not that it is by thy device the chieftain is here : know I not thou dost seek his life?"

" I do ; I am sworn to it—but that villain forestalls me. I will not, though the blood of O'Connor of Fitzclare must be shed, that it shall be by the man I hate ! Vengeance is sweet, and I will have mine on him also, nor suffer his designs to prosper ;—I have sworn that too. Hilda of Fitzclare, I have sworn, shall not be his !"

A fearful exclamation burst from Sir Guy D'Esterre as the thought thus suggested

flashed across him. At the moment the group appeared in sight; the two girls walking foremost; the chieftain followed, slowly ascending the bank. A hard grasp on his arm made Sir Guy turn his head towards Lawrence, who, with a face of wild horror, shouted aloud—

“Quick! for life! for life!”

It was too late. Gliding from behind the rock, a long rapier glittered in the air at the moment, when, with a cry—we might have said a roar—Guy came leaping from crag to crag, to the rescue. The cowardly assassins, who committed a secret murder for pay, fled at the bare sound of his voice, believing the troopers were upon them, as they saw the flash of his helmet among the trees. He sprang from the rock on the narrow, broken pathway, precisely as Hilda, with an exceedingly bitter cry, had turned back, and cast herself on the body of her foredoomed father, vainly seeking to shield him from the stroke that did not need to be repeated.

He rushed on after the recreant murderers, but the cries of poor Isabel arrested his progress, and made him feel the necessity of

abandoning pursuit. In vain he looked for Lawrence : all was solitude and stillness around. The blood that marked the path, the prostrate forms, were all that could tell him that murderers had been there. Lawrence had disappeared, and he was alone with three moveless, voiceless bodies ; for Isabel was now silent, and nearly senseless.

That Hilda, too, had fallen by the assassin's blow, he did not at first doubt, and in anguish, well nigh insupportable, he raised the fair form in his arms, clasping it wildly to his heart.

The action had an effect the reverse of what he would have desired. Hilda's arms were only forcibly removed from their clasp of her father's body, but, when lifted from it, the poor girl believed herself to be in the grasp of the base and cruel murderer.

She did not faint : she did not scream ; but with an energy, the force of which took him by surprise, she flung herself from his arms, and, springing aside, caught up the heavy staff her father had carried, whirling it round her head as she stood at bay, with flashing eyes and distended nostrils.

The weapon slowly sank as she met the gaze of her lover, whom she had not recognised. But her bewildered and terrified looks showed him she was still in uncertainty as to what had passed.

"I saw his face," she said, doubtfully, "his demon face !"

"Villanous coward ! would he had tarried one minute, till this sword had searched out his traitor heart !" cried Guy. "But thanks to Heaven, thou art safe !" and so saying, he stepped back, and lifted the bleeding body of her father in his arms.

"He lives !" he cried ; "if we could but move him hence."

The chieftain unclosed his heavy eyes, looked at him, and articulated his name in a tone of wonderment, but shook his head at the mention of removal.

"No : life ebbs fast : disturb me not. I knew it, my children—the doom was on me ; but I feared it was on you—I see it now. Christ pardon me—may His dear blood blot out my sins !"

"Oh ! in His blessed wounds may thy soul be hidden !" cried his daughter, bending

on her knees beside him, "Father in Heaven, hear our prayer!"

"And let our cry come unto Thee," sobbed Isabel, in response.

"By thy Cross and Passion," murmured Hilda.

"Good Lord deliver us," the other answered.

"In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment."

"God deliver him!" cried Isabel.

"God deliver me," was gurgled from the throat of the dying chief. A tear damped the eyelashes of the knight, who held the heavy head upon his knees, and who, too, prayed in his heart that Christ, of His love and pity, would receive the soul so rudely sent forth from its strong-built tenement; yet thought also of how many he had seen dismissed from life without a thought, without a word of prayer, of penitence, or hope.

"Would I could get him some water!" he said, as, after staunching the floor of blood, he began to feel hope of his revival. Hilda rose from her knees—

"Lend me thy casque," Sir Guy, she said,

thus, in a manner unlooked for by them both, breaking her promise of never speaking to him more.

"Thou shalt not stir hence!" he cried, forcing her by a grasp on her arm to his side.

Isabel heard the words without comprehending their cause; she caught up the casque and flew away to the side of the lake. Fear gave way to the impulse of her strong affections, and Guy let her go without opposition.

When she returned, Hilda was again on her knees, but beside the already kneeling knight; and the broad hands of the chieftain, who had caused himself to be raised in a sitting posture, supported by the rock, rested on both their heads. She heard the words uttered by him—

"May my death be accepted, and my children be spared—ye are free now—take your father's blessing?"

Trembling, with her heart full of tears, and dreading lest she should be excluded from the portion of a child, the little girl approached, and, kneeling with the helmet

of water in both hands, she bowed her fair head, and said—

“For Morven’s sake bless me too, and let me bear thy blessing to thy son !”

And the chieftain drew her first to his breast, and said—

“My daughter, tell my son I bade thee to be to him what his mother was to me ; and bade him to be more to thee than his father was to her :”—and then, as she knelt, he blessed her for them both.

We need not linger on the scene. Two hours afterwards the body of the chieftain lay lifeless and nearly cold on the rocky path : and his daughter knelt still beside it.

She could not be induced to leave her watch. When Guy wished to persuade her to do so, she lifted her eyes—eyes that as yet were almost quite tearless, and repeatedly looked into his, he had not the heart to bid her go. He was more firm, however, in refusing to leave her. That, no power, he declared, could induce him to do ; and so, as little Isabel dared not go alone to demand the help of the troopers quartered in the valley below, the three kept mournful watch

and ward beside the dead, and might have done so long enough if D'Esterre's old sergeant, with three of his soldiers, had not at last found out the spot to which he said he had been desired to repair to the succour of his captain, who had been beset by ruffians.

The description of the person who bore these tidings answered too exactly to the person of Lawrence to leave them in doubt as to identity.

The soldiers removed the body of the chieftain; and O'Connor of Fitzclare was laid in the splendid, but half-despoiled church of the sequestered convent.

Sir Guy believed he would be authorized in resting there until tidings of what had passed could reach the Lord Lieutenant, with a request also that the young chief of Fitzclare should be sent to conduct the obsequies of his father, and to take away his sister and his betrothed.

With such an arrangement Isabel had acquiesced, but with Hilda he had not spoken.

It was only shortly before he expected the return of the horsemen with the youth they

had been sent to conduct, that he ventured to intrude on her sacred sorrow.

He was forced to seek her in the church : there, kneeling beside her father's bier, her place had almost constantly been. There, pale, calm, and still, she was praying when, softening his tread, he stole up and knelt beside her. They felt their hearts, without audible sound, prayed together—together rose up to one Father—through one Mediator—clung to one Cross—hung thereon one and the same hope. And when, after long, silent, but not unblest communion, he lifted her in his arms, and bore her unresistingly from the church, it was not to assail her startled ear with words of earthly love, or pictured happiness. Deeper than ever that passion lay in his own heart ; but too deep, too true, to issue out in words at such a time.

“Pardon, my Hilda, this disturbance,” he said, “I must leave thee, love ; Morven will be with thee.”

She bowed her head in assent ; but it went low, lower, till it rested on a true, brave breast, in which, like the dove that had found no rest for its foot, her heart sought its earthly

ark. And then her tears flowed freely, though they rested not long on her pale, cold check.

* * * * *

Frantic was the grief of Morven ; but its violence was far less affecting to D'Esterre than the quiet, marble-like face of his beloved Hilda. There was even more pathos to him in the fitful grief of little Isabel. He was sure that Morven's would soon pass away ; and felt no ungrounded fear lest the accession of the young chief to the headship of his clan would give him an influence, or power, which might be used to his own danger, and, it might even be, to that of the noble Lord to whose service he was attached. He set off, however, with his men, a few hours after the young chief's arrival ; leaving a charge to his mourning love to repair to the metropolis under her brother's protection, and with satisfaction receiving her assurance that she would, if duty drew him elsewhere, remain there in careful seclusion, avoiding to go out unless he requested her to do so. His anxiety to keep her from the danger, a sense of which, unknown to himself, still haunted him, led him to exact this promise.

With this, Hilda and Sir Guy D'Esterre parted. She remained to follow out her melancholy funeral duties: he went forward with his dragoons to meet the Lord Lieutenant, and join the march back to Dublin.

Little had been effected by him, and the anger of Queen Elizabeth was seen by sagacious eyes to be louring in the distance, ready to burst on the ill-directed head of her rash and deceived Viceroy. With the tithe of his army, after a three months' absence, he returned to the Castle, to write for what she most hated to send him—men and money.

Her rage soon exploded; and Essex, as if in order to appease it, gave out that he was about to march against O'Neil. Some older heads were gravely shaken, and the belief that no battle would come off between these gallant chiefs was often hinted. With a more pensive mind, yet truly, it must be confessed, with a much happier heart, Guy returned to his old quarters; and we will only take him up again on the plains of Ulster.

CHAPTER XII.

It was night : the small force, consisting of only about 4000 men, to which the brave, glittering host of Essex had been reduced, was now posted on a plain, divided by a narrow but rather deep stream from the ground occupied by the rebel chieftain, O'Neil.

It was Guy D'Esterre's duty to be on guard about the tent of the Lord Lieutenant; but for some cause, unintelligible to him, that duty was to be performed by the young chieftain, O'Connor of Fitzclare. Though released, Guy did not, however, feel relieved; his mind was heavy and anxious. It was not the doubts or anxieties of a lover that drove sleep from his eyes that night, and sent him out beneath the cloudy, mist-shrouded moon,

to watch at a distance over the tent of his Lord. He had long loved Essex, as a comrade in arms, as a gallant leader, and a generous friend : if he ever had confidence in the rash, hot-headed, and warmly patriotic brother of his now plighted wife, he had latterly lost it. The disposition of the Earl of Essex, though modified by English blood and education, was, in many respects, kindred to that of the young Hibernian, who had consequently at once become a favourite ; and the ardent devotion and intense admiration which the youth felt and displayed, had won the affection and confidence of his Lord.

D'Esterre knew, as others likewise did, that the zeal of the young man had been employed successfully in winning many of his neutral or adverse countrymen to the English service : but the doubt that assailed him on this point was, whether this allegiance were really given to the Queen of England or to the Earl of Essex :—that Morven did not mean it to be to both, he felt painfully sure.

Guy had long penetrated into the designs which the young chieftain believed were

most carefully and cautiously veiled in his own breast ; for the veil was of native manufacture, and here and there was carelessly adjusted, so that eyes on the look-out could see plainly enough what was otherwise well hidden. And now it was the belief that a part of those designs embraced a coalition between the Lord Lieutenant and the Earl of Tyrone, that kept our knight disturbed and watchful ; for that such proceedings, though based on Morven's love of country and devotion to his Lord, could issue only in danger and loss, his steadier mind and fuller experience clearly perceived.— But from such gloomy prognostications his thoughts veered round to a more serene and brighter quarter. Hilda rose, as the steadily shining star in the deep blue vault above the lower clouds that darkened his pathway ; and, dwelling in a lover's rapt meditation on the thought of one so unlike her brother, the latter was forgotten, and Sir Guy had, in fancy, escaped from Irish miseries, and settled himself in an English manor with his lovely bride for his companion,—when, lifting his head against the

stem of a tree to which his back was placed, he perceived two figures standing at a short distance, who were not in military garb, and appeared to be in earnest discourse. Advancing in the screen of the trees, he approached near enough to see, as the beam of the cloud-struggling moon fell upon it, the sinister countenance of Symonds: the face of his companion he could not see; but that the presence of that man whom he knew to be a spy and murderer, one who had recently had cause for personal enmity against Essex, and who was known, also, to be the hireling of those who wished him no good, boded evil to the inconsiderate Earl,—Guy immediately felt. To draw his sword, step forward, and take instant vengeance upon him for his recent murder of the chieftain, was his first impulse; but, simultaneously with the movement, the pair separated without perceiving him: Symonds rapidly retired, and the other hastened onward, direct to the tent of the Lord Lieutenant.

Convinced that treachery was on foot, and the life of Essex in danger, Guy as speedily followed. There was no challenge

given, for no guard was set : and the intruder's hand was on the curtain of the tent when Guy's seized him by the neck, and flung him backwards on the ground.

"Hush ! for the love of St. Patrick," cried an eager voice, in suppressed tones, as Morven darted from the tent. "Is that you, Guy?—what are you about here?"

"What art thou about, young man?" returned Sir Guy, angrily ; "here are no sentinels set, and thy Lord left unguarded to the mercy of a villain !"

But Morven was too busy assisting the stranger to rise to attend to his words ; and, looking up, the speaker saw Essex himself immediately behind him.

"Thanks for your zeal, Sir Guy," he said, in a rather constrained tone ; "but we apprehend no danger where there is none."

With a deep bow the discomfited knight retired, not even turning his head to see what became of the stranger who had met such rough usage at his hands. That, whoever he was, he was no unexpected visitor, was now clear ; that he was also the emissary of O'Neil, he was pretty well convinced ;

but, if so, Symonds was, beyond doubt, the secret informer employed by the enemies of Essex, or by the authorized spies of his Court ; and, acting at the same time as the pretended friend of the Irish chief, was thus at once drawing the former into danger, and possessing himself of information concerning both, which would be transmitted to those he served.

It was with a dissatisfied mind, and rather heavy heart, that Sir Guy, compelled to let matters take their course, repaired to his quarters for the rest of the night. He was aroused in the morning by intelligence that the enemy was in sight.

"The enemy !" he involuntarily repeated in a doubtful manner, as he rose, and joined his troop, already getting under arms.

"Think you we shall come to blows to-day ?" he said, as he drew near old Anster.

"O'Neil knows what he is about too well for that," was the reply.

The Irish troops halted a short distance from the river ; Essex, attended by his escort, drew up on the bank.

The Champion of the Faith, as O'Neil was

now styled, although the general opinion did not altogether contradict that which Essex had expressed,—namely, that he cared as much for religion as the horse he sat on,—advanced alone to the edge of the stream, and for a few moments the two chiefs sat thus on horseback confronting each other. Then, striking the spurs to the sides of his steed, and bending his head almost to the saddle-bow, O'Neil plunged forward, dashed into the stream, and halted midway, regarding his opponent with an air that invited and claimed confidence. The chivalrous Earl, blushing to be outdone, urged on his charger ; but as he reached the water's edge O'Neil gained it, and, mounting the bank on his foeman's side, gallantly greeted his noble adversary.

“Bravely done !—nobly !—beautifully !” cried Morven, almost mad with excitement ; while the two generals, having exchanged greetings, rode side by side along the river.

“Now then,” cried Guy, in a more savage mood, as he plunged his sword into the scabbard, “now ends for ever my Irish campaigning.”

Thus did the scene, that gave hope and joy to the one, present to the other the heavy prospect of disappointment or shame.

The conference of the two chiefs was without listeners, but not without observers: all was carefully noted down and reported, but of what actually was said all were ignorant. A treaty was concluded with O'Neil, and the British troops that had followed Essex into Ulster followed him back as they had come.

Sir Guy D'Esterre was not among them, for, an expedition to another district having been ordered, he was put in command of it; somewhat to his annoyance, it must be owned, for Hilda Fitzclare had been left in Dublin.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN our knight, having accomplished the duty on which he had been sent, returned to the Castle of Dublin, his first wish was to visit his betrothed. He was, in fact, in the act of changing his travel suit, and setting off a person that was quite well enough in itself to the best possible advantage, before he presented himself to her beautiful eyes, when his pleasant prospects were at all events thrown a little into the distance by an order to attend the Lord Lieutenant instantly.

The messenger who brought it said his Excellency had already frequently required to know if he had arrived, and desired his immediate attendance.

The man's face seemed full of mysteries,

which he only wanted the least encouragement to divulge.

Guy, occupied by other thoughts, scarcely perceived, and did not at all develop, the store of intelligence with which his mind was charged. He had long felt that Morven Fitzclare had somehow come between him and that full and intimate confidence that had subsisted at a former period on the part of the Lord Lieutenant towards him. He did not impute any low or deceitful conduct or selfish motive to his intended brother-in-law; but the circumstance that had occurred during the long talked-of expedition against O'Neil had only too painfully convinced him that the ardent young Irishman was, unknown to himself, drawn in to further the schemes of the enemies of his Lord, even while he fancied himself to be promoting the cause of his country, together with that of the noble patron he so cordially loved.

The sight of the sinister countenance of Symonds on that night had shown him that that man's talents for intrigue were now turned to account in the service of those who desired

to entangle the Earl in a real or apparent combination with the native chief. Morven had allowed our knight no opportunity of acquainting Essex with a circumstance of which he was unhappily ignorant—namely, that all these movements were closely watched, and amply reported, with all the colouring that could be given them, by the spies of the English Court. Guy had reason to fear that even other views for his sister's alliance were entering the youth's brain—a project which he resolved should be vainly formed ; and he suspected also, that his recent consignment to a distant quarter had resulted from the young favourite's dislike of his interference and sager counsels.

Essex, too, had grown more distant and reserved towards him than had been his wont in earlier times. The reason would have been more apparent to other eyes than his own. The character of Sir Guy D'Esterre was formed in a stronger, a somewhat sterner mould, than that of the Earl ; but it was, moreover, guided and maintained by a principle which, if it had naturally existed in the latter, had long been lost in a life of courtly corruption.

Thus Guy had now returned from his temporary banishment to a remote quarter, quite ignorant of what was going on, either at the Castle of Dublin or the Court of England. News travelled slowly ; and even letters he had not received. Thus it was a pretty strong evidence of the absorbing nature of the thoughts that had occupied him, that he should pass over so inattentively the budget of intelligence that was visible in the man who attended him ; instead of extracting which, he thought only of completing his toilet in haste, and then repaired to the cabinet of the Lord Lieutenant, indulging the hope that his attendance there would be short, and with Hilda only in his thoughts and before his eyes, as he presented himself there.

The Earl was impetuously pacing the floor, on which lay, flung indignantly from his hand, a crumpled epistle—an angry letter from his offended and imperious Queen. His brow was flushed : it seemed the blood had mounted there from his face : his lips quivered with ungoverned passion.

“Dishonour !—talk of dishonour to those who know the meaning of the word !” he

was saying—"Never shall it be coupled with the name of Devereux! The army—tush! were the banner of Essex unfurled, think ye——." Arresting his words, he added, more calmly,—“leave me, I pray you, Sir Christopher, and you, too, good Southampton; I would think over this matter.”

And, as the Master of the Horse and Sir Christopher Blount retired, the distracted Viceroy threw himself into a chair, and plunged into thought so deeply, as to be unconscious that D'Esterre stood in amazement, blended with compassion, gazing upon him. Essex raised his fevered brow from his clasped hands, and met looks that suddenly called him back to other and better days.

“Ha! Sir Guy,” he said,—“thou hast stood by me in more fairly fought fields! We shall fight this out too, although the weapons against us are, as Scripture saith, arrows that fly in darkness. Art come to tender suit and service, Guy?”

“My Lord, and noble friend,” the other answered, with emotion, “my sword and service are yours, as yours are our Queen’s. True to yourself and true to her Grace,

your own brave heart will bear you gallantly on. One honest man can, as the same Scripture also saith, chase a thousand rogues ; and no weapon formed in the blackness of darkness itself shall prosper against the man who with a clear conscience puts his trust in God."

"Before there was a beard on thy lip, there was surely a gray head on thy shoulders, Guy," said the Earl, with a somewhat painful smile. "The service of which you speak," he added, "is like to be scant ; for I trow if it be given to me as mine is given to Elizabeth of England, both our swords may go sleep in their scabbards."

"But fear not," he continued, as Guy hastily broke in with an exclamation deprecating any rash procedure on his part—"fear not that I shall forget what is due to her Grace. No: it is against the men who deceive her alone—against the enemies who thirst for my blood, or the ruin of my honour—that I would act. Hold thyself in readiness, then, good knight, for thou shalt go forth with me right soon to confront and confound them. I know my royal lady

too well to fear their power when once I am back at the Court."

A hasty and clanking step had approached, and while the last sentence was being uttered, Morven Fitzclare, booted, spurred, and splashed with mud, stood at the door, and heard them. A consternation was depicted on his face and features which it would be impossible to describe. With a bound he sprang forward, threw himself on his knee, and, grasping the Viceroy's hand, exclaimed, as with his other he dashed the long disordered locks from his heated brow, and in a voice husky from fatigue and emotion—

"My Lord, my Liege ! the only sovereign I ever did or will acknowledge—recall those words—hurry not to your ruin and our loss. Remember the warning of the O'Neil ! We are ready, my best Lord : a thousand swords as good as Fitzclare's shall be at your command. Go not—go not for this bleeding country's sake, if not for thine own—to brave the Lioness in her den."

"Traitor!"—cried D'Esterre, in a burst of uncontrolled rage,—“traitor, wouldst thou dare to breathe rebellion to thy Lord?”

Morven sprang to his feet ; his rapier sprang as quickly from its sheath.

“Beware !” cried the commanding voice of the Lord Lieutenant. “Young man, you forget this is no brawling place. Put up thy sword, Fitzclare ; and thou, Sir Guy, if it please thee, we would crave of thy goodness to remember that the dishonouring word now given to the follower must attach also to the leader.”

“Such was far from its intention, my good Lord,” Guy was replying, with a submissive bow, when the young Irishman interrupted—

“He is the traitor—the foul traitor who would lure his Lord from his faithful friends to deliver him up to his deadly foes !”

“Shame ! shame ! young man !” cried Essex, interposing ; “Sir Guy D'Esterre has been too long and well known to me that I should suffer such an imputation on his honour. Your zeal, good Fitzclare, outruns your wisdom this time ; we thank thee for the one, but pray thee not to part with the other ; which truly we all need to keep in

times like these. Go, change thy attire, thou art in unseemly trim."

Checked like a froward boy, the young chief was about to withdraw, having been thus dismissed, when D'Esterre stopped him—

"Ere this youth departs, my Lord," he said, with a slight curl of the lip, that added to the sting of the word "youth" as applied to the chief of his clan, "permit me to say to your Lordship—not to him who so lightly utters words of grave import—that, might I presume to give counsel that ought to be tendered to your Excellency by sager heads than mine, such counsel would be now for the first time given."

"Say on, then," said Essex, carelessly examining a paper as he spoke.

"To abide in the place, and perform the duty her Majesty appointed; and, with a clear conscience, leave your cause to be proved, and your enemies dealt with, by the Judge of all."

Understanding these words to have been spoken as much for the information of Morven Fitzclare respecting his real sentiments as for his own benefit, Essex only replied

by dismissing them both. But, calling back D'Esterre, with a view to prevent the risk of a combat with his hot-headed comrade, he desired him to remain in waiting in the ante-room for the space of an hour, adding that, if he were not summoned within that time, he might consider himself at liberty at its close.

"Sorry should I be to measure swords with *him*," muttered Sir Guy, as, sorely dissatisfied with the order, he passed close by the ear of the chafing youth to the room where he was commanded to wait. The words were capable of two interpretations,—one expressive of scorn of an antagonist comparatively untried in arms ; the other, of a reluctance to a combat with a friend and future kinsman.

In the warmth of his passionate temper, the former might have been the true one ; and so Morven took them ; and the fiery glance that shot from his eye in return told D'Esterre he did so, and was, before very long, recalled to the recollection of our knight, with other feelings than it, at the moment, inspired.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE appointed hour passed tediously away ; Guy considered it to be merely one of solitary confinement, and the impatience of a lover was largely mingled with the deepest anxieties of a friend. The fate of the noble Earl, he felt, now hung in the balance ; of the exact state of affairs he knew nothing positively, but he saw or surmised pretty much of the truth. What the wisest and best friends of the misguided Viceroy had foreseen or feared, had come to pass : his imprudence had thrown him open to the arts of his watchful enemies ; his generosity had exposed him to their misrepresentations ; his loyalty had been impugned ; his ambition magnified ; his clemency to the Irish, and his treaty with O'Neil, gave a colouring

of reality to the wild thoughts which the brain of Morven Fitzclare had long cherished, but which Sir Guy could not believe had ever been seriously contemplated by his Lord.

"To be king of this wild land, to rule over it by the will of O'Neil," was his reflection, as he paced his appointed bounds, "Heaven knows, were such a lot offered to me, I should not desire to draw it!"

But, in the midst of gravest thoughts, lighter ones will rise, and, as the latter one passed through his mind, there appeared before him the image of the beautiful and queenly Hilda, as a crowned bride—

"Thronéd by the sea,"

and, thinking how surpassingly well she would become her regal state, Sir Guy might have reconciled himself to share the throne of the mighty Ireland with her at his side, if a lover's dream had not been brought to an end by discovering that the hour had expired, and he was at liberty to set forth to visit her whom in this, and every time of trouble, he hoped to look to as the minister of his good angel.

A sad reverse to such anticipations awaited him.

Isabel, with both hands extended, ran to salute him as an expected visitor ; a circumstance that at first surprised him, as he had not announced even his intended return to the capital ; but the question that followed was more startling ; it was—

“ Where have you left Hilda ? ”

“ Left her !—I came to find her here !—Say, sweet Isabel, where is she ? ”

“ Gone, an hour hence, to meet you ! ” cried Isabel—“ did you not send for her ? ”

A terrible pang shot through D'Esterre's very heart, and drove the blood from his face.

“ Speak, speak, Isabel, for the love of Heaven explain this, and quickly ! ”

“ It was about an hour ago,” said Isabel, “ a messenger came hither from the Castle to tell Hilda you had arrived there, but were detained by pressing affairs with the Lord Lieutenant, and should quit it again on the morrow : this she well believed, and so, when he added that he was sent to escort her there—to our friend's dwelling—

she made no demur, but said Mary must go with her. Mary was not to be found, and I wished to go, but——”

“But what?” he impatiently demanded.

“The messenger said, when I wanted to do so,” continued Isabel, blushing, “that the O'Connor of Fitzclare, who has been absent for many days, had also returned, and told him to say he would be here to visit me forthwith; so—so—you know Hilda was forced to go alone!”

“She is there, then, beyond a doubt,” Guy replied, relieving himself by the assertion; “she waits for me, while I looked to meet her here.”

“That may well be,” said Isabel, musingly; “but why did that man come if you did not send him, Sir Guy?”

The question made Sir Guy bound from the spot he stood on, and, with scarcely a farewell to little Isabel, he rushed away.

His inquiries at the house of the friend whom the young girls were in the habit of visiting, in the precincts of the Castle, only deepened his fears and increased his perplexity. The lady was utterly ignorant of

the circumstances, and had neither seen nor heard of Hilda.

Issuing into the street, Guy stood there a few moments in reflection. The suspicion that had darted to his mind allayed his apprehension, but added to his irritation. This disappearance of his betrothed was a trick of her brother's—of that he felt sure : it was a piece of revenge for what had passed.

“Just like his Irish blood,” thought the knight,—who always forgot that his Hilda had that same blood in her pure veins—“That fiery eye of his, as we parted, might have told me he would have vengeance of some sort.—Mad boy that he is ! But it will not be for another hour's duration.”

And so resolving, he strode rapidly on, meaning to seek the young chief's quarters.

Not many such paces had been made, when a sudden grasp of his arm pulled him up. The dim light only allowed him to see that the person who detained him was of a stature so much beneath his as to appear dwarfish.

“Sir Guy D'Esterre ?” said an unpleasant Irish voice.

"The same, at your service. What want you with me?" said Guy, recognising the well-remembered figure.

"Do you want the Lady Hilda Fitzclare?—If so, lose not a moment, or she is lost to you for ever."

"Lead on," cried Guy; "show me where she is. If thou art honest, thou shalt have a good reward."

"Reward? pshaw!—the Saxon deems that gold settles all accounts. On, on—pause not to prate about that. I did thee an ill turn once, when I cared neither good nor bad for thee, but so far as thou couldst be made use of against O'Connor of Fitzclare; if I do thee a good one now, I care for thee neither more nor less, except so far as you disappoint the man I hate, and protect her I would save. See, I am honest with thee! On! if thou wilt, to my work—if not, all depends on this instant, and I go my way!"

"And I follow it," said D'Esterre, significantly drawing his sword.

"Aye, keep it so," Lawrence observed, as, in obedience to his somewhat imperative gesture, he stepped forward to precede him,—

"You may have work for it : and, for my end, as good your sword as that of another."

"Is there no other end for one like thee ?" said the knight, with, perhaps, a scornful thought in his mind.

"None :" answered Lawrence, in a tone that somehow gave a thrill of awe to the hearer. "The doom was on all my house—the doom of the blood-spiller—it is on me—on me now. I feel it coming.—Hush ! silence !"

The last word was whispered ; and Lawrence, drawing back, screened himself behind D'Esterre's larger figure, while two men passed them, going in the contrary way.

As soon as they had done so, he hurried more quickly on, muttering only the words—

"It is as I hoped—he has gone."

D'Esterre, however, fancied the footsteps of the passers-by had halted, and he believed they were looking after them : yet, fully convinced that Hilda was only detained by her brother, and that if Lawrence were really bringing him to the rescue, it was only to effect his own ends, he did not think it very

necessary to guard against the chance of a rencontre with the young chief, whom he was persuaded he would soon bring to reason, especially when seconded by her.

Intent, then, only on finding her, he pushed on rapidly after his strange guide, whose short paces were so quick as to almost become a run.

Without a pause, he turned into a narrow and quite dark passage or entry. As Guy precipitately turned to follow him, a sword flashed in the gloom, and rattled against the steel breast-piece he wore.

"Ha, traitor!" he exclaimed, "base knave!" But a shrill scream a few steps lower in the passage told him his wretched guide, instead of being his assailant, had, probably, at the same instant, received his death-blow. Backing to the street, he had scarcely time to form a thought, when another sword was plunged into his side, and, with the single word "Hilda!" Sir Guy sank to the ground.

CHAPTER XV.

THE sight of a dead body in the streets of Dublin was a spectacle not sufficiently uncommon to attract much notoriety, but as that of Sir Guy D'Esterre had been found by some soldiers of the guard, the report of his death was forthwith conveyed to the Castle.

Old Anster, his tough heart bursting with smothered grief, arrived at the spot. He found there another man, who, though evidently dying, was not insensible, and believed him to have been the murderer of his friend, by whose sword he had, in return, fallen. In hope of discovering the facts of the case, he ordered the removal of the dying man, as well as that of the insensible knight, in whose body he speedily perceived

life was not extinct ; although, from the loss of blood, it was nearly so. The "Leech," was soon at hand, and his services were necessary before a removal could be effected with safety. Anster then, giving the supposed murderer into the charge of the soldiers, and desiring them to keep him alive, if they could, till he came to examine him, attended the bier that bore his young friend, whom he had loved as a son, to his own quarters ; a tear, spite of his efforts, forcing itself beneath his eyelids.

Morning had come, and the sunbeam enlightened, in outward aspect, the scene of a foul midnight murder, but the circumstances that led to it were still in darkness.

Leaving Sir Guy in the hands of the surgeons, Anster hastened to clear up the mystery, by questioning the wounded man who had been found with him.

In answer to his speech, Lawrence uttered the words—

"A priest—as you hope for salvation—bring me a priest !"

"Miserable wretch !" said the stern and upright soldier, "base murderer !—hope you to make all straight for yourself in the next

world, after all the foul work you have made here?"

"Not enough—not enough!" gasped the unhappy man, whose senses, he saw, began to wander; "Mother, have I not done enough?—don't shake your gray hair and thin arms at me—I will go and do it—my vow shall be kept—the O'Connor of Fitzclare is dead; his fair, proud son—has gone—gone—has gone—gone—to the block—on Tower Hill, mother.—It was a small matter to spare the girl,—ah! she is gone too—I have murdered her—she will perish with him—the ship—the ship!"

His eyes were open, and staring as if he saw into the future: his words came thick and gaspingly.

"He lives," he murmured again; "the villain—traitor—murderer, to punish whom I forgot even my vow—he lives; he has taken the prize he sought for—but he perishes—see!"

His glazed eyes, staring into empty space, appeared to see some terrible, yet almost gratifying spectacle.

"Speak you of Sir Guy D'Esterre?" his hearer demanded.

The name appeared to recall the wandering reason of the dying man.

"He is dead—they killed him—he lay dead beside me. They made her pass him, when they took her away."

"Didst *thou* not kill him?" asked Anster, his whole mind so set on the circumstances that affected Sir Guy as to render all the rest of small moment to him.

"I? ha! I had other work to do—a priest! a priest!—Oh! for the love of Heaven bring me a priest!"

"If thou didst not slay Sir Guy, I will, if I can lay hold on such a ——; but hold," cried the old soldier, stopping his words—"thou shalt have the priest if I can catch one, provided always thou art not the murderer of Sir Guy D'Esterre."

"I am dying for him—for her," the voice of the wretched Lawrence murmured.

"Thou shalt have the priest, and then we will hear more of the matter," cried Anster, and hurried off to perform a promise which, even though such offices as Lawrence desired were proscribed, could, he knew, be easily fulfilled. Intrusting his commission to a man whose religious convictions would lead

him to execute it with zeal and fidelity, and without deeming his steadfast loyalty to be impugned by his compliance with the last desire of a dying man, he afterwards took his place beside the couch of the wounded knight, determined to watch him to the last.

The struggle of life with death appeared indeed severe, but the former, as in histories like that of Sir Guy D'Esterre it usually does, had the victory : and Anster had soon the heartfelt satisfaction of hearing his voice again. His first word, however, was what his last had been—"Hilda !" Believing that he wished her to be acquainted with his condition, and ignorant that what had passed had been so much connected with her, Anster went directly to the house where poor Isabel was in a state of deplorable terror and distress—not, it must be owned, solely on Hilda's account, much as she loved the noble girl, but also because she had, just as the old soldier arrived, heard the news with which the astounded capital of Ireland was ringing—the news of the abrupt departure of the Lord Lieutenant, with his few attendants, for England.

Many there were, indeed, to whom that

precipitate step had been known beforehand; at least many there were who had clearly foreseen it would be taken : many, too, who now as clearly foresaw its results, and, like the unhappy Lawrence, predicted that it would bring himself and his followers to the block. Others there were, who, with truer and better hearts, felt as the sanguine, too presumptuous Essex did, that his presence at the British Court would confound his slanderers, and allow him once more to bask in the love and favour of his fond Queen.

Wiser and better informed heads—whose owners had hearts as true as those others—took a graver view of the proceeding, and feared the experiment of trying to regain a worn-out and disappointed love.

The little maiden whom Anster found in a passion of grief did not trouble herself with the political bearings of the case, nor, much as she admired him, were its personal results to the young Earl her chief concern. Morven had gone off with the Lord Lieutenant ; gone in such haste that he had not even thought of taking leave of her.

“ And where was his sister ? ” asked Major

Anster; and then, to his astonishment, heard the story we have already related. The meaning now of D'Esterre's weak, and, as he then thought, wandering words, appeared intelligible to him. Coupled with the name of the young chieftain, Guy had twice repeated the words,—“He could not—no! a midnight assassin—no!”

The intelligence of a brawl between the young men in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant, on the preceding day, had reached Anster's ear; and, with no very strong partiality to Ireland or the Irishry, his sagacious brain readily made out that the abduction of D'Esterre's betrothed bride resulted in part from the schemes her hot-headed brother was known to be forming, and was partly an act of vengeance against her lover. That Morven Fitzclare had been his assailant, he was also convinced. The paleness, the emotion which the youth had shown when his death, which was then supposed to have taken place, was reported to him and others, instead of being proofs of latent affection and grief for what had occurred, were recollected by the old officer as proofs of guilt.

He left the weeping girl, to repair again to the wretched victim of this confusion and wrong—the dying Lawrence. He found he was already dead ; had been so for some time. His miserable life—devoted by the mad spirit of revenge to work the misery of others—was ended.

With a heavy heart the old man returned to his patient, and reported all that he had learned.

And there, to the quarters he now shared with the suffering knight, would daily come peeping to the door the half-shrouded eyes of the deserted Isabel, glancing, like those of a half-tamed fawn, from under her hood, simple and guileless as a child ; but with an anxiety on her young face, which she took little pains to conceal, had not the wounded knight for its object. Each day there was some ardent but ever-to-be-disappointed hope that Morven might have been heard of,—that Hilda might have reappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF all conditions in which the physical nature and human soul of man require the greatest amount of patience, it is when, with a pressing demand upon our active energies, and a deep anxiety to put them into exercise, there is a positive incapability even to arise and walk.

The general, gagged and bound, while his army before his eyes required his help to save it; or the father, unable to move while his children were famishing for the food his labour had procured them,—never suffered more than did poor Sir Guy during his long confinement.

Civil commotion and political confusion prevailed around him; but it must be owned that the chief cause of his anxiety and impatience was not that he could take no part in

public affairs : his mind was engrossed by one concern, and that preyed upon it so keenly, that a constant and burning fever tended considerably to retard the recovery he ceaselessly struggled to attain.

Isabel found him one day, weak and wan, indeed, and much changed in appearance, but up and dressed in his usual manner.

"Is it not too soon, Guy?" she asked, in the familiar way she had lately adopted.

"Pray Heaven it be not too late!" was his response.

She looked earnestly at him. He was so pale, and the large brown eyes, whose open fearless gaze used to frighten her, for she had thought it bold, were now so languid, and expressive of sadness, if not fixed melancholy, that timidity was banished from her gentle and loving nature.

"You must not go out, sir knight. You are my prisoner," she cried ; and, placing herself before the door, extended both her fair little arms across it.

"Ere many days, sweet maid, I must burst that formidable barrier," he replied, cheated

out of a smile by her look of resolution. "Ere many days, I must depart for England."

The arms sunk down : the lips parted, and remained so. A moment the girl stood as if beneath a spell. Then she stepped forward, and, lifting those arms to their utmost stretch, laid her hands on the shoulders that were by no means so broad as they had lately been ; and, with her fair locks sweeping his breast, lifted up her bright, child-like, begging eyes to his, and said—

"Take me with thee."

His lips touched the snow-white forehead.

"Yes, fair child, I will take thee : whatever comes to pass, I will protect thee till thou hast another protector. Thou art all, sweet Isabel, that remains to me of what was good in this wretched land !"

"Guy," said she, in a low whisper, and without raising her head, "dost thou really doubt Hilda ?"

That chest heaved beneath it : she felt the sigh that was rising pressed strongly down ; but there was a decided "No !" pronounced.

"Then do you think," she added, in a still deeper tone, "that she is dead?"

"Let us be seated, maiden," he answered :
"I am yet weak as a girl."

They sat down, and then—

"That thought," he said, "has oft-times troubled me ; it shakes my heart at moments, as it did when you spoke just now, with unutterable dread. But I believe it not. No : Hilda is not dead. Too well do I know the soul which has so often communed with my own, to believe it would depart from its mortal dwelling-place unperceived by me—it was one with mine!"

Little Isabel looked and listened ; but she did not understand. This was a flight above her : she was only wondering if Morven's soul and hers had ever talked together ; and she shuddered with superstitious awe at the notion of Hilda's ghost coming gliding in to inform her lover of its departure from this life.

"No, Hilda lives," continued D'Esterre ;
"but I am robbed of her ; and I go to seek the robber."

He set his teeth, and his muscles contracted as with a spasm.

"And I will go with thee, and we will re-join Morven," cried Isabel.

"Name him not !" Guy exclaimed, with looks that astounded her.

A new light broke upon her very unspeculative mind. She rose up from beside him ; stood erect ; pressed her crossed hands upon her bosom, and with a look of meekness, mingled with firmness, quite uncommon on such a face, she said—

"Sir Guy D'Esterre, do you suspect Morven ?"

"I do," he answered ; but with a sense of pain, like that a tender-hearted witness might feel whose evidence sentenced a person to death.

She moved in silence a few paces from him ; her rose-leaf colour faded slowly, almost beautifully away. As she walked towards the door, she turned back over her shoulder her now lily-white face, round which the long, bright hair was gleaming, and her eyes, full of an unusual light—a light the beholder had never fancied there was

power of mind sufficient to draw into them—cast back on Guy a gaze he could not firmly stand.

“Isabel, sweetest Isabel, come hither ! leave me not, when I need thee most,” he pleaded.

She stopped, and stood before him ; her hands still crossed ; her little head proudly thrown back.

“And yet he went without a word—a farewell—and she has never even heard of him,” muttered Sir Guy, only half to himself.

“And if he did—and if he hath never sent to me—never even thought of me,” cried the girl, with now fast swelling breast—“if he have, even ere this, found another love, having learned Saxon ways at that false Court of thine—think you for that, Sir Guy, that I would call the man friend, or protector, who held him to be a midnight assassin, who believed that he struck in the darkness one against whom he had no just cause for vengeance.”

“Come hither, Isabel,” Guy repeated ; and with a step like a child who sees some object

half of dread, and half of attraction, she slowly crept back.

“Thy beautiful love, sweetchild—of which Heaven grant that Fitzclare may yet prove himself worthy!—thy noble indignation, also, join with the wishes of my heart in his favour. Yes, trust me, Isabel, it has not been alone for my own loss I have pined—it has not been grief for myself that has preyed upon my once stout frame, and wasted it as you see. Next to carping anxiety for her, for whom I would die many deaths, has been shame for the guilt of one who was to me as a brother. Your heart acquits him, maiden, and that true heart is to me an index to the truth of his. You will come with me, then; I will guard thee as a father, Isabel, and, while you find your truant lover, I swear to find my love!”

Isabel, perhaps, was only half-satisfied, but she was wholly conciliated: the prospect of getting away from her dreary and desolate state—the hope of rejoining her random young chieftain, perhaps of finding the lost Hilda—were too pleasing to be sacrificed to the condition she at first strove to make—

namely, that her guardian knight should first declare his restored belief in the honour of her betrothed. That he could not do ; and the pain that had been awakened in her little heart was not wholly removed : it remained, and often keenly revived ; and Guy, as he observed the quick overshadowing of that pretty face, felt something like a twinge of remorse at having so emphatically pronounced the words, " I do," in answer to her inquiry as to his suspicions of Morven.

When the Earl of Essex so abruptly deserted his post, in hopes to make good his cause with Elizabeth before her decision, in all cases slowly taken, should be pronounced against it, we are told that "all sorts of knights, captains, officers, and soldiers, abandoned their posts and services, and flocked over to England." Old Anster was one who sturdily maintained his ; and it was only the state of health of his friend Sir Guy, and his incapacity for present service, as well as the fact that he had been immediately attached to the person of the Lord Lieutenant, that made him at all acquiesce in the propriety of his

quitting the army, or rather the remnant of the army, that still survived in Ireland.

“God be with thee, lad,” he said, as he shook his hand on board ship; “if thou shouldst get a lodging in the Tower, prithee make them send for me to share it with thee. I have lived too long in the service to be fit for much else now.”

And so Sir Guy D'Esterre and his half-joyful, half-tearful, fairy friend embarked, and sailed away from a land that had been the scene of change or adventure to both. They watched its misty shore recede and disappear, with varied emotions.

“And now, Ireland is left; and I wonder,” said Isabel, “what we shall have to go through next; and when we shall see it again?”

Poor child! she was never to see it more: and, had her first question been answered, how great would have been her terror!

Before they had long lost sight of that coast, she seated herself in as comfortable a position as she could, just at the knight's knee; and, while he wrapped her from the chilly air, she said—

“Now, good Sir Guy, tell me, I pray thee, the whole story of thy misadventure on that night when thou wast so basely assailed, and wounded nigh to death. I would fain hear it all, from first to last.”

He did so, and much in the manner in which we have heard it already.

“Know you the house, Sir Guy,—saw you it plainly?”

He answered, No, but that, having noticed the road he had taken, and perceived that the houses had discontinued before he reached it, he had ascertained its position sufficiently to direct his friend Anster how to find it, even if that old soldier had not been more clearly guided by the fact that D'Esterre's body, and that of his more unfortunate guide, had been found in the court that led to it. Anster had searched the house, and found it totally deserted; and all that could be discovered by inquiries was, that it had been occasionally used by two men, one much taller than the other, and both of them Saxons.

Isabel remained in thought, her forefinger laid along her cheek. She rose up, just as a beam from the red sun, sinking in its

ocean bed, fell full on her face and figure, and swathed her in its own pure glory. Her bright, smooth forehead seemed to sparkle in its glow, and to reflect it back. So lovely, so elevated, did she look, that had her guardian knight one bit of a heart left in his possession, it might no longer have remained so.

Yet abashed did he feel before the child-like maiden, as with a forefinger lifted, and the sunset light around her, she looked him in the face, and said,—

“See you now, sir knight, how wrongfully you have broken God’s command, and borne false witness against thy neighbour! Symonds was your assassin: and Symonds it was who has rifled you of your betrothed Hilda.”

With an exclamation that was almost a cry—fierce, and even agonizing—Guy sprang to his feet.

“Fool! dotard! idiot that I was!—I have left him behind—her, too!”

And with sundry more such epithets, which men more readily address to themselves than they would suffer others to do, Guy rushed

to the side of the ship, causing Isabel to fly more quickly after him, in the belief that he meant to cast himself overboard in the hope of regaining the shore they had left.

To stand on shipboard and discover, just as return is impossible, that you have made a terrible mistake in leaving the shore, is never very agreeable : in this case it was almost maddening. He was receding from, instead of advancing to, the object of his voyage ; and that also under the freshly awakened conviction of the fearful danger of delay in accomplishing it. He shuddered in indescribable horror at the thought of what might be his Hilda's fate. It was his own loss he had suffered for, while he believed her to have been carried off by her brother ; but, that she was in the power of the disappointed and wicked Symonds, was now a thought that reason could hardly stand, while the narrow limits of the ship confined his movements, and the pathless deep around him mocked his desire to burst those bounds.

At such moments came little Isabel to his side, hanging all her fairy weight upon his arm, as if she really did believe he me-

ditated the plunge overboard ; and, looking up to his frightfully clouded face, would say—

“We are going to find our Hilda. That I well know :” but, true to her perfectly feminine nature, the maiden could never give a reason for the opinion to which she steadfastly held ; and, when pressed for one, she would say—

“See now, Sir Guy, I will wager you a new silk kirtle, one as brave as that your Queen sent to the wife of MacMurrough, to entice her to win over him and his clan to her service—yes, I will wager you one as brave—that Symonds hath taken her to England.”

“But tell me why ? As to thy kirtle, I would rather thou shouldst win and wear it than I.”

“And thou wilt give it me ?”

“Yes ; for thy bridal, sweet maid,”—and a heavy sigh closed the words.

“Well, see now why I think thus. The Earl, you know, hath gone to see his Queen, because, they say, she loved him ; and if he hath done aught to her displeasure, she will forgive him as soon as she sees him.

Now," continued Isabel, reasoning in her own way—"when a lover is forgiven—why——"

"He takes more liberties than before," said D'Esterre, cheated out of a grim sort of smile.

"Ah! that, it seems, you know,"—she added, shaking her sagacious head. "Well, then, Essex would, in such case, come back to Ireland to confound his enemies, and rejoice his friends; and think you that Master Symonds would wait his coming? I trow not. His base, plotting arts have prospered, and he has gone back to his own land with their fruits. Mind you not, too, what Master Anster told us Lawrence had said about a ship?"

Guy, fortunately, did not recall the precise and apparently incoherent words; but—

"Thou art wiser than I am, fair maid; he would not stay in the same land with me, after such an act,"—he replied, thoughtfully. "Yes, I see it all now. It was Symonds who passed us with another as we went to that house: those two men followed us unperceived: they were the assassins;—but then ——" a deep groan followed, for,

--again the recollection that, be he where he might—Hilda must still be in his power, caused him to break from the clinging arm of his winning little companion.

Every consideration, however, tended to establish the fact which she had discovered ; and that discovery wonderfully banished the overshadowing of her fair countenance—the shadow that of late used to sweep over its light, like that of a drifting cloud on the sunny mountain's side. For, much as she loved Hilda, there was one paramount love in her young heart, and the belief that Morven's fame was clear gave an almost overbalancing joy to the shock of discovering that Symonds had apparently succeeded in his long cherished design.

Thus slowly passed the time away, more in cloud than in sunshine ; in fits of storm on the part of the chafing knight, whose heart burned with impatience, and in anxious and earnest effort on that of the young girl, who now learned or practised a self-control for which Guy had never given her credit ; while, instead of exacting, as he had expected, his attentions, she devoted herself with charming

simplicity to win him from his troubled moods.

Their voyage, which at that time, and even much later, required as many days, if not weeks,* as it now takes hours to accomplish, we will suppose to be at last safely ended; and resume our knight's history on his arrival in London.

* We may record the now curious fact that a Militia regiment, sent from Ireland to England about A.D. 1813, took one month to accomplish the voyage.

CHAPTER XVII.

No sooner had D'Esterre placed his young charge in safe keeping, than he hastened forth to trace out, if he could, the haunts of Symonds. He knew that he had been employed in the service of the nobleman with whom he had appeared on that memorable day at the Castle of Dublin. To his house in the metropolis he meant first to repair, in order to demand information respecting this man. On his way he encountered the famous Sir John Harrington, the sight of whom alone might have reminded him how entirely love, with all its intense, absorbing selfishness, had cast to a distance from his thoughts the cares of friendship and concern for public affairs.

Tidings of the departed Lord Lieutenant

of Ireland had been scantily received there, for his intercourse with that country was jealously watched. D'Esterre was still unacquainted both with the particulars of his reception by Elizabeth, and of his actual position at that moment. Sir John had, therefore, much news to tell, and these were sufficiently interesting to enable his hearer to bridle his impatience for some time.

The witty godson of Queen Elizabeth had been regularly commissioned to watch and report the doings of the foredoomed Earl of Essex in his government : he was ordered to keep a journal of his actions and his words, for the after perusal of the sovereign who sent her favourite out as her Viceroy with nearly unlimited powers. Harrington, however, became the friend not only of Essex, but of his Queen's formidable opponent, the O'Neil. From the former, to the great indignation of that imperious lady, he received the honour of knighthood, and to the son of the latter he gave his translation of Ariosto. He had wit and cleverness, however, to escape paying the forfeit of his head for such offences. As he, together with Sir Christo-

pher Blount, the Earl of Southampton, and others of his most attached friends and followers, including our young chief of Fitzclare, had attended Essex in his precipitate flight to the presence of his angry sovereign, Guy was eager to learn from him the particulars of a reception which had, in the first instance, speedily been announced as most favourable. Subsequent intelligence had been cautiously and slowly despatched to the seat of his government ; though it had been quickly made known, by Essex himself, that Elizabeth had received him with her accustomed favour and tenderness. That matters had afterwards assumed another aspect, and that the rash Earl was even supposed to be in some danger, Guy had heard rumoured, but even at the Court men wrote and spoke in figurative language concerning him who at that moment engaged all thoughts ; and in distracted Ireland, and during the seclusion of illness, the ignorance in which Sir Guy had continued was by no means marvellous.

From Harrington he learned facts, with the outline of which history renders us familiar.

That knight told him how the rash, head-strong young Earl had mounted in hot haste at the water-side ; and all in travel-garb, and covered with mud and dirt, the splashes of which were even on his heated, excited face, had burst into the Queen's bed-chamber, just as the wonderfully intricate and important process of making an old lady young had commenced : how he had fallen on his knees, and covered the hands, of whose beauty she was so conscious, with warm, and, perhaps, then sincere kisses : for that the passionate nature of Essex was not destitute of some affection for his dotingly fond mistress, there is no reason to doubt. And her old love was in her heart, and she yielded to his passion or his penitence ; and for a moment forgot the coquette in the natural feelings of the woman.

I believe Queen Elizabeth has never been represented by the artist in this scene. The paints prepared to recolour the aged skin ; the eighty wigs of elaborate hair-work ; the towering ruffs that concealed the scraggy neck ; the famous three thousand jewelled gowns, from which one should be selected to

cover the stiff, withered figure; the false mirrors that were to hide the trace of the daring hand of Time—all ready, but unused! Then, the thunder-struck sycophants who were the handmaids of vanity, and the miserable slaves of worldliness—surrounding the unattired object of their cares, who, with gray hairs (which were not worn as the “crown of glory”) unconcealed by auburn locks, with unpainted face—stood exposed, in all her reality, to the eyes of one of her many professed adorers. And, kneeling at her feet, the young, generous, high-minded, impetuous nobleman, who had placed his all, as it were, on a single cast, and did not need now to simulate the passion, the excitement, he displayed.

The moment after his dismissal, the living features of the scene would change. The malignant looks of the ladies of the royal bed-chamber would have previously told that their dismay arose, not because the grotto of their chaste Diana had been so madly invaded, but because they feared the rashness of the invader was the plank that would bear the nearly engulfed man to safety. Among them might be seen those dark, dull eyes, that had

watched and followed the foredoomed favourite on the eve of his departure for a government that was to prove the trap wherein to take him. For, as soon as, exulting in the caress of his royal lady, "in the sweetness," as he said, of her "restored favour," the young Lord withdrew from the chamber, this lady adroitly placed a looking-glass before her mistress.

A very small action will produce many events : and this small one was a link in the chain that raised the headsman's axe within the precincts of the blood-stained Tower.

"And wherefore," asked Sir Guy, "after vouchsafing him so warm, so loving a reception, wherefore did she so visit him with her wrath on their next meeting?"

"Said I not that her wig was not set on when he saw her?" Harrington made answer. "Why, man, when she saw herself afterwards, in her half-changed night-gear, think you not it is marvellous that our Lieutenant had not suffered the fate of one not so rash by half as himself? To see Diana bathing, certes, was not so dangerous by a thousand fold as to see Queen Elizabeth dressing. Ha!

Guy, trust me the hounds are loosed now that will run our noble stag to bay, or drag him speedily down."

Harrington went on to relate his own strange visit to her Highness ; how she plucked him by the girdle, and swore, and asked him if the fool had brought him, too, from Ireland : and how he had escaped from her with more fear and trembling than from the Irish rebels ; with sundry matters also which his listener impatiently heard, detained only because amidst these he also related circumstances that concerned the Earl, whom he understood to be in a position of great danger, pursued by the inveterate hatred of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Secretary Cecil, the Earl of Nottingham, and many other rancorous enemies, who surrounded the Queen, and debarred him all access to her : among whom—and not the least formidable when the angry sovereign was a woman—were the ladies of the Court, in some of whose breasts the passion of what had once been called love for Essex had changed, by his fault, or their frailty, into such intense hate and vengeance as that passion only can produce.

Yet amid them went the gentle Lady Scrope, wearing constant mourning in token of her sympathy with the disgrace of her noble friend.

Parting at length from his loquacious companion, D'Esterre hastened on to the house of the nobleman in whose service he knew Symonds had been, and who had obtained some part of the estates lately confiscated in Ireland. He was absent, and his visitor desired to be shown to his secretary. This personage was an old man, who had been a zealous, or, in other words, a furious Roman Catholic in the days of Queen Mary, and was under Elizabeth quite as zealous a Protestant, having been very actively employed against the party to which he had once belonged, and done his Lord no small service by his skill in discovering papistical plots and alien priests.

The withered face was not raised from its bent-down position as he sat looking over papers when Guy appeared; but the pale gray eyes were raised, in a way that seemed to leave only their whites visible, as he scrutinized his visitor's countenance.

“What may be your good pleasure, fair sir,” he demanded in a tone that might tell a discerner in such matters that the information wanted would be only given so far as was desirable for the speaker’s interests.

“I want,” said Guy, with what is called soldier-like brevity, “a man named Symonds, whom I saw erewhile with thy Lord at the Castle of Dublin. Canst thou tell me where he is?”

The old face was raised, and a cold sneer, meant, perhaps, for a smile, just moved the lip, as the aged man replied, in a sedate, yet evidently relieved manner,—

“Mayhap I could : the question now-a-days might not be so difficult ; since it is not the fashion to believe in purgatory.”

“What mean you, sir,” cried his hearer, in astonishment, and at first with some anger —“Not surely,” he added, “that the villain is dead?”

“Dead—aye, if fire and water between them, and no escape from either, can have made him so. His ship took fire at sea—my Lord lost much goods by the mischance : it utterly perished with Master Symonds and

all he had on board. The fool had put off too hastily."

Guy D'Esterre, with hands clasped on his brow, rushed away—away, he thought not whither ; for a fire was burning in his brain sufficient to render him a raving madman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two weeks had nearly passed from that day, so dreadful to poor Isabel, when Sir Guy D'Esterre had returned to the house where she was lodged, in a state that demanded the instant aid of a physician, whose cares did not save him from an alarming fever. Only partially restored to strength when he had put to sea, his mental irritation during that voyage, prolonged as it was by contrary winds, had acted even on his naturally robust frame, and by no means nervous constitution. Thus the fearful shock he received was one he was physically, as well as mentally, ill-prepared to support with the courage that might have been expected from a man like him. He never reasoned on the truth or reality of what he heard, for the powers of reason

were at once arrested, and the brain, for many days, appeared almost in a state of paralysis.

Another scene in her short, and assuredly sufficiently varied experience of life, for little Isabel ! Fortunately, her hostess was a notable and motherly old woman, with whom Sir Guy had had a much earlier acquaintance, for she had known him from boyhood ; and in an illness that appeared to the wondering girl more like the results of bewitchment than ordinary malady, she only felt called upon to assist in preparing the extraordinary remedies which the medical learning of the times, or the popular belief, supposed to be efficacious.

It was well she, too, did not get a malady of the brain ; but her poor little heart bore all the suffering, and so free was the other from pain or aching, one might suppose she had none. Indeed, the heart, in that little composition, did duty for the brain : she acted from the dictates of one, without ever seeming to make use of the other.

Strangely was that poor heart tormented now. She was near Morven,—in the very

town, she was sure, with him, yet knew not where or how to find him. She could not even learn whether Sir Guy had done so. He had left her with that intention, but came back only to rave of things that gave the terrified child the frightful idea of Hilda having been burned to death, or drowned : but whether it were by judicial execution under the decree of the Queen of England, or by the act of the wicked Symonds, she could not gather from his disjointed words. Of Morven she could gain no intelligence, and the mention of Essex to him caused so much impatient excitement, that she dared not venture again to name him.

In such a case, nothing remained, the maiden thought, but to adventure herself forth to seek her lover. Alas ! hers was, in some respects, by no means an undoubting love ; and hardly had she formed this resolution, than the fear assailed her that the runaway youth had reasons for keeping silence, and not seeking her. Isabel's cheek burned, and then grew pale, at the notion of presenting herself before him undesired ; and in her dilemma, she was glad to think of the kindness the

Lord Lieutenant had always shown to her ; the affection—almost fatherly, as she believed—with which he had treated her.

Yes, to Essex she would go : she would tell him of D'Esterre's state, and request the chieftain of Fitzclare should be sent to him. That surely was only a reasonable course, and one that maidenly modesty need not shrink from.

She knew not, however, where Lord Essex was. Before she arrived in London, she had pleased herself in thinking of the wonderful tale of the Eastern princess who had come to seek her Christian lover there, knowing only the name of Gilbert, which she kept repeating as she wandered through the unknown streets until she found him. A similar talisman would the name of Morven be, she believed, to her ; but now—now that she was there, in that, to her, terrible London—she felt her talisman lose its power.

The Earl of Essex at that moment occupied too much of the thoughts and attention of all conditions of men for his locality and circumstances not to be readily ascertained : and Isabel soon obtained from her hostess

more information than she, indeed, wished to hear.

She learned all, and more, than Guy had heard from Sir John Harrington. The rashness of the doomed Earl's disposition, acted on by treachery, and goaded forward by the cruel falsehood of his malicious foes, was rapidly precipitating the catastrophe which all persons expected, though some did not foresee how it was to turn. That the Court must change, or Essex fall, was obvious : but opinion was divided as to which should be the case ; while, that the Queen was not threatened, all parties knew and believed.

Essex had been a spoiled pet : he had the destiny of such ; a larger return of gratitude was looked for than he was capable of paying ; the memory of slighted favours only tended to harden the heart of his once doting mistress, who had not, as might be wished, only felt for him a mother's fondness. But she was not his real enemy. The great Elizabeth was only a woman, and as such was edged on by clever and false advisers ; she was the prey of whisperers—female whisperers, too, whose pestiferous breath infected her secret

chambers—the victim of counsellors who affected to be guided by her wisdom and power, which they dared blasphemously to compare to that of the Most High, even while, with some reason and truth, resisting the unjust claims of the Papacy to absolute spiritual jurisdiction. Her large masculine understanding did not save her from the lot of woman: she surrounded herself with great and clever men, and their crafty wisdom imperceptibly steered her course. She bound men of genius to her service, and the adulatory praises lavished on her in the writings of that ever-memorable age long enwreathed her name with a lustre which the altered principles, or cool sagacity, of our epoch, has considerably tarnished.

All this, though connected with the fate of Elizabeth's victim, has nothing to do with the proceedings of our little Isabel; who, having somewhat relieved her overburdened mind by making her hostess the depository of her anxieties, and given her a sketch of the history and adventures that have been glanced over in these pages, received in re-

turn a terrific account of the doings at Essex House ; most exaggerated reports of which were kept in circulation by means of persons who had objects to accomplish in exaggerating the dangers to be expected from Essex, even while they tried to exasperate him to more open disloyalty.

This good woman was what in our days might be termed a staunch Conservative, or rather, in recent ones, a good Tory ; she did not hold with the Puritan party ; and a part of her details consisted in a description that astonished, and even frightened, her young hearer more than all the rest,—a description of the awful figures in black gowns and white ruffs, that were allowed to enter Essex House ; and in their preachings, declaimed against “ Church and State,” asserting that it were as well to have the Pope himself for a head to the Church of England ; that they had only changed a man for a woman : and sundry other heretical doctrines, such as the good woman believed Papists only could preach, though these men were Puritans, and right bitter against the Papists.

Finally she concluded that no pretty-faced

and modest maiden, like our Isabel, dare show herself at a place which was now the resort of loose company ; and assured the disappointed girl she could not even walk in the streets, nor approach the Strand alone, without molestation.

“If you were a boy, indeed, fair mistress, I would not say you nay, if your heart was set on seeing the noble Lord ; but as it is, I would as soon send a pet lamb into a fold of wolves,” she concluded ; and walking, as she spoke, to an oaken chest—“Saw you ever such bravery as this ?” she added, exhibiting the full equipment for a page’s dress. “Alackaday ! when I spoke but now of your being a boy, I bethought me of the likeness you bore to him for whose sake I keep these clothes—though he never wore them, for he fell sick and died !”

Isabel sprang up to the woman’s neck, and, clasping both her arms round it, kissed the eyes on which tears had gathered.

“And thou wilt let me don them now ? good mother, dear mother,—say yes. See, only see, what a comely page I will make !”

“Fie, then !—it is not meet, for modesty’s

sake, sweet child," said the matron ; but the kisses stopped her words.

"For love's sake, dear mother, I must go forth—I cannot, cannot refrain. In sooth, I shall be as dead as he who owned this pretty attire, if thou wilt say me nay : and poor Sir Guy, too."

"Thou art but a wild one, I see. That comes of bringing up children in foreign lands. Well, take thy way, pretty one."

Out came the dress. With the love of adventure, derived both from Spanish and Irish blood, with the gladsomeness of innocent youth, and in the elation of spirits, the continued depression of which would soon crush the life from that bounding heart, the little maiden speedily equipped herself ; with blushes and laughter arranged the dress as suitably as she could ; threw round her shoulders the protecting mantle, and only stopped short in dismay at finding that her beautiful hair was far too long and luxuriant to be in unison with her attire.

Without scruple, Isabel would have snatched up a shears and shorn it all off. But there was a restraining thought—

Morven liked these locks ; Morven would not like her so well without them. So she wound them into a coil round her head ; and, securing the page's smart cap over them, was fully satisfied with her appearance, and believed her disguise to be as complete as it was becoming.

At a time in London history when people took the air in Smithfield, as they do now in Hyde Park, the Strand was a pleasant walk, as its name imports, on the banks of the Thames—the Belgravia of the age—planted with the mansions of the great men whose names are now given to the narrow streets that run down to the river,—as their gardens in old times did.

Along this the little page rapidly proceeded ; assuming an indifference that might have drawn upon him the observation he would have avoided, if it had not chanced that the thoughts of all the passers-by were engaged with more engrossing matter.

The number of persons, either standing idly gazing at a stately mansion, or entering within its court, convinced Isabel that it was the Essex House to which her steps were

directed. Her admittance there might have been easy at the moment ; but a sudden tremor assailed her ; and, when her wish was on the point of gratification, she began to wonder at and regret the predicament in which she found herself. She stopped short at the door of the very house she had so longed to enter : the boldness of her procedure, the shamelessness of her disguise, overwhelmed her with fears, which, in her eager excitement, she had never imagined. Not many minutes had she stood thus irresolute, and actuated, it might seem, only by idle curiosity in loitering there, when a side-door opened, and a person richly attired in the fashion of the Court appeared at it, anxiously peering out to all quarters, as if looking eagerly for some one, whose non-appearance perplexed him. His eye fell on the seeming page, and brightened as it did so. He beckoned him over ; and, appearing to recognise the dress, addressed him, as if aware of the service he was in.

“ See you, boy, he said,” drawing out a letter he had concealed, “ this is a matter of life and death. Your Lord will recompense

your zeal. Speed with this letter to Whitehall, ask for Mistress Mary, and deliver it only to her own hand. Away ! away ! good fellow."

He drew back in haste, having enclosed the billet himself in the page's doublet, unobservant of the tremor he caused. Isabel as speedily disappeared. Trembling with groundless terror, she stopped, ere long, to reflect on what had passed, and on what she ought to do.

The letter was there in her doublet, and her dread of discovery had made her go off with it, as if in the intention of performing the errand on which, she apprehended, she had been sent in mistake for another messenger.

"Yet, wherefore not do it?" she asked herself; "it is on the service of my Lord of Essex, and needs despatch ; the answer, too, will admit me to his presence. Ah ! that is good. That will effect all I want. Now, does not all go well to those who keep a true heart and a good courage ?"

And cheerily stepped the maiden onward ; and many were the admiring looks and

friendly nods bestowed on the pretty boy, as he went along inquiring from time to time his road to Whitehall, without ever conjecturing his destination was to the Palace of the formidable Queen of England. They pointed out to her its very portals, without awakening in her preoccupied mind a suspicion of the fact. An attendant, reading the address on the letter she would not part with, conducted her to a waiting-room; into which, after a short delay, there came a lady still young—at least not old, but one—

“ Whose aspect and whose air impressed
A troubled memory on the breast.”

Yet were both perfectly still—so still—so outwardly calm, that the paleness of the face might seem to arise from the torpid circulation of the blood. But as she took the letter there was a gleam in her large dark eyes that made the heart of its bearer to quiver. If any one has seen the couchant tiger in the dark, when its eye first perceives afar off the prey it lies in watch to pounce on, such a one may understand the sort of

impression those black orbs made on Isabel's fancy ; or, if the tiger eye be too terrible a symbol, take its miniature likeness—the eye of a cat in the dark, as it watches the face of the mouse protruded at its portal in the wall, and wipes its jaws in bloodthirsty expectancy. A good heart is always true in its inspirations ; and a suspicion smote that of Isabel, that an enemy to Essex had sent that missive, and another enemy received it. A likeness at the moment struck her between the aristocratic face of the lady of the English Court and that of the revengeful Irishman, Lawrence. It was because the same passion burned in the breasts of both.

Isabel, in her childlike purity, guessed not wherefore, in the lady's case, this was so. She thought not that the deep hatred she bore to the fascinating Earl of Essex was the fruit of as deep a love. His lips had learned too readily and too soon the false language of a most corrupt and profligate Court. Its Queen had first been attracted by his appearance in his twenty-first year, at the glorious camp of Tilbury—the one great scene of that long reign which ever will re-

main with undiminished lustre in its annals, and in English hearts ; and from that time till he had entered his thirty-fifth, his prime of life had been spent in the false professions of an adoring, profligate lover for a mistress rather too old to be his mother, who exacted such devotion from young men, grave generals, and wise counsellors. It were not wonderful, if under such tuition he amused his idle hours in practising among her attendants the adulatory arts ambition led him to adopt with herself. This dark-eyed lady was perhaps only one of their victims, and only one of those whose malice poisoned the heart of his once doting mistress, by retailing to her words truly or falsely said to have been uttered by Essex concerning that royal person, which she believed, and every one asserted to be, the only perfect form of beauty ever given to the world.

But in this one soul there burned a deadly fire which the blood of the false Earl alone had power to slake. His marriage with the fair widow of Sir Philip Sidney, the Queen had, at least partly and outwardly, forgiven—but she had not reckoned on being his wife : her

attendant had done so. Hers were the eyes so watchful, so calm in the darkness of their malignity, that Sir Guy D'Esterre had observed on the memorable evening when he had been conducted so abruptly from prison to the Court. He felt then that they would follow Essex to his fatal government—that they would not leave him till they had seen the end.

The lady had withdrawn with the letter, leaving the messenger to await an answer. But time passed, and no answer came. Very disagreeable it was to Isabel to wait there so long alone, and still ignorant of what place she was in, although had she known it, it is possible she would have effected an escape.

After a long, wearisome interval the lady of Court reappeared, opening the door partially, and beckoning to the page to follow her. The still countenance was now disturbed ; it wore a look of fear : there was a lowering contraction of the brows, the result of anxiety and impatience. She led the way, and ushered the seeming page in silence into a room, within the door of which Isabel stood, transfixed in terror and amaze.

The figure of an old woman, tall, thin, and arrayed in a robe of vast richness, adorned profusely with jewels, was rapidly pacing the rush-covered floor, holding a tremendously long sword in her hand, with which, at intervals, she struck the tapestry-hung walls as if in delirium, aiming a stroke at the figures it depicted. As she turned and faced the page, she presented to a wondering, terrified gaze an aged, but carefully painted face; the high, thin nose had become sharply hooked; the formation of the eyebrows gave an expression akin to fierceness to an otherwise noble forehead, amid whose wrinkles a fearless, generous character might at other times be traced, though now it was troubled by a spirit like that which the harp of David used to allay in Saul.

The withered and well-painted face was enclosed by the enormous ruff, whose height all other ruffs were by Act of Parliament forbidden to reach; and out of which the sharp face and keen brown eyes looked forth in a manner that, had the little page been in a gayer mood, might have recalled the old, vulgar similitude of the owl in the ivy-bush.

An elaborate wig of reddish hair surmounted the ruff, and was overtopped by a head-gear so tall as to give a grenadier height and aspect to the figure.

Had our ignorant Isabel seen this form in another state, she might not have recognised it as that of the great Queen Elizabeth ; but its angry movements, its chafed mood—above all, the sword it grasped—tallied pretty well with the child-like notion she had, as we have before said, formed of Elizabeth of England.

Yet, as she stood before her, and met her eye, the girl felt its power. Stopping in her angry walk, like a vexed lioness, the royal lady turned, and steadily regarded the countenance of the astonished page ; her own, as she did so, changed sensibly.

“It is but a child,” she said, slowly, as she perused the pure, innocent, and undisguised face. “How came he in Essex House—in that den of thieves—so young—so good:—and dost *thou* serve Sir Ferdinand?”—she added, without waiting for any answer, “dost thou learn so soon to betray—canst thou already give soft words with the lip,

and curse in thine heart?—Thou hast learned *that*, if thou art toward, and servest my Lord of Essex.”

“So please your Highness, he serves not”—interposed the lady attendant.

But the moment of calmness was past.—With her horrible oath, which, at the risk of dramatic effect being lost, we do not record, Elizabeth, as if maddened by the name she had uttered, resumed her walk, breaking off into another strain.

“Ha! our mind,” he saith, “hath now become as crooked as our misshapen body! See you, child, is thy form more straight? Bend we an inch from the stature God gave us? Go, tell thy false Lord the figure of Elizabeth is as erect as he saw it first at Tilbury, when he said he fancied that Venus had taken the disguise of Mars. Stooped it ever to Pope or Spaniard? and shall it stoop for him—for Robert Devereux—Earl of Essex no more!”

The sword struck again at the tapestry, but declined from the hand that feebly held it.

“Devereux!—Devereux!” murmured Elizabeth, in the tone of a mother mourning for her son; “Devereux,”—she added, dwelling

on the old familiar name, "said I not to thee erewhile, that Christ did weep over Jerusalem, longing to gather its rebel children to His care even as a hen her chickens beneath her wing—and how often—how often would I?—ha! he that hath eaten bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. But lo! the measure he metes is measured to him again—for thou, sirrah! art come hither to deceive and betray thy Lord!"

Unable to comprehend the disjointed and rambling discourse to which this hasty turn had been given, Isabel guessed rather than knew by its conclusion, that she was supposed to be in the service of Essex, and to have conveyed intelligence against him. For the first time, though terrified at the Queen's furious look, she found words, and hurriedly exclaimed—

"I deceive no one!—least of all would I deceive or injure the noble, generous, true-hearted Earl of Essex!"

"Peace, bold youth!" cried the lady in waiting, eagerly interrupting what she did not wish the Queen to hear. "Peace; and mend thy manners, thou graceless cub! how darest

thou stand while in presence of her Highness?"

The page, indeed, had neglected to "sit upon his knees," a position that was now reluctantly assumed. Mistress Mary, meanwhile, adroitly whispered something to Elizabeth regarding him, which, whatever it was, changed the current of her thoughts; for her next speech utterly overwhelmed the hapless child with confusion.

"And saw you ever such limbs, Moll?" she asked Mistress Mary. "Canst thou dance, boy?—I trow, right bravely:—he shall dance before us," added the great Queen, who could so well display the dignity of a monarch, and so often lay aside that of a woman.

"Your Grace must send him about his business now, or he will have had favour enough to turn his little brains for the rest of his days," said Mistress Mary, anxious to have the page dismissed; since, with alarm, she had gathered from his speech that he was not in the confidence of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, the traitor to Essex who acquainted her and the Court with all the Earl's words, actions, or designs.

"Be not too much puffed up, child," said

Elizabeth, in reply. "We admitted thee to our presence, because we would learn——"

"Heaven help us!" cried the lady, in affectedly sudden surprise, interrupting a question she dreaded—"if the boy has not kept his cap on his head!"—and, darting forward in apparently irrepressible indignation, she stopped the words, as she meant to change the object of the Queen, by seizing the offensive cap, and forcibly lifting it from the head it sheltered.

Up to their too well-secured covering rose some of the long, bright locks; and, to their full length, reaching even to the floor she knelt on, down streamed the rest,

"And down her slender form they spread,
In ringlets rich and rare."

A cry of dismay broke from the rash lady: Elizabeth stood silent and erect.

"Minion!" said the latter, after a somewhat awful pause, and in a tone that almost drove the life-blood from poor Isabel's heart, "minion! wanton! for what purpose is this mummer?"

Up rose the girl, and stood erect—it was like the fawn standing at bay.

“Such names, O Queen!” she said, in her ignorance employing language, as she had hitherto shown a manner, unlike that of ordinary custom—“such names belong not to me, and ought not to sully a maiden’s lips. You ask me for what purpose is this mummery?—I will tell the cause.”

And straightforward, with marvellous rapidity and clearness, Isabel related the whole occurrence, the reason of her disguise, the object of her visit to Essex House, and the manner in which she had received the letter that had caused so much commotion.

“If truth hath not perished out of the land, she speaks by thee, poor child,” said Elizabeth, with a softened aspect. “Yet—hold!—didst thou not say thou hadst come from Ireland?” An oath again burst from her lips, and with it, turning to her attendant, she cried, “What if this were she?”

That lady’s eyes were fixed on Isabel; the pupils were drawn down, so as to be nearly invisible: their deadly regard made her shiver, and again think of Lawrence.

“Speak,” said Elizabeth, in her voice of command, “as thou wilt answer for it, tell us truly, art thou that maiden of the Irishry

whom Essex brought with him here—of whose beauty we have heard tell—whom he had with him, even while he hastened to our feet—she, whom they say is still with him?”

“Merciful Father! can it be?” cried Isabel, her thoughts flying away from herself and her position: “Can it be Hilda? O Queen Elizabeth, tell me—is it Hilda of whom you speak? Has the Earl saved her?”

She sprang towards the Queen, her outstretched arms appearing ready to clasp the somewhat terrific form.

“She acts well! right marvellously!” said Mistress Mary, interposing: “suffer me, your Grace, to dismiss the bold thing: it is not meet that one so shameless should tarry in your pure sight.”

“Aye, see her out, good Moll: sooth to say, we need no longer brag of our powers to discern truth from falsehood. They tell us we are as gods—they say we can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart! Good troth, they lie; and we will believe no more. 'Tis pity, too, of one so young and fair!”

Isabel heard indistinctly the words; for the surging blood swept through her head, and caused a tingling in her ears, as she felt her-

self almost forcibly drawn away : her cap was put again upon her head, so as to conceal the betraying hair, and herself made over, as if she were the page she seemed, to the charge of two yeomen of the guard who stood outside the door, and who were ordered to accompany the page to the house where he had stated he had left Sir Guy D'Esterre in sickness, and to inform Mistress Mary, on their return, of the truth of this statement.

The lady then retired ; in great chagrin at the unexpected scene that had arisen out of the Queen's wish to interrogate a messenger supposed by her to have come from Essex House, and to be able to speak of affairs there, concerning which Mistress Mary was satisfied that her confidant, and the page's supposed master, Sir Ferdinando Gorges, had fully prepared him to give an account conformable to their views ; whereas the betrayer of Essex, having missed of his customary messenger, and being obliged to seize an opportune occasion for the despatch of his information, had intrusted it to the disguised page, believing he was in the service of another of the confederated ladies of the Court.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE sight that Isabel had witnessed was, indeed, but the beginning of terrors at the court of Queen Elizabeth. The insurrection of the Earl of Essex was now hourly expected. Busy go-betweens had alarmed both Queen and Earl with fears of each other, till they succeeded in impelling the latter into the very conduct they had planned for him to adopt.

The city was supposed to befriend the liberal-minded nobleman ; the Puritan ministers were his friends ; and even those preachers at St. Paul's Cross who leaned to that party were ready to lend their eloquence to his cause.

Essex had never formed a design on the crown of England: to drive his enemies from the Court, to clear them from the councils of

its Queen, and regain his place and influence there, were what he professed he wished to do. This, however, involved the seizure of the palace ; and under that apprehension it was strongly guarded.

The days of Tilbury had long past away ; but their ghost—a ghastly one—returned. The Maiden Queen, grim and faltering in her old age, once more laid hold of a sword, which she never afterwards wholly resigned. It lay beside her even at meals, telling, in its impotence, a melancholy tale.

It was while terror universally prevailed, while men's minds, tossed to and fro by strange and contradictory reports, knew not which to believe, that our little Isabel, with a courage and pertinacity of which no one who saw the childish and frolicsome maiden would suppose her capable, again, after all that had befallen her in it, equipped herself in the page's dress.

Sir Guy had almost come to himself—that is to say, his wandering senses had : so that he was able to listen to her wonderful recital of the adventure that she had met. But that recital maddened him almost worse than

before : he would rise and go forth ; and in the effort he nearly fell into the little arms that could not support him. Thus strong men are brought low ; and thus do they ofttimes have recourse to a reed that fails when they lean upon it.

Little Isabel stopped not to moralize : she placed the head of the knight—who but lately would have thought that to bear her whole person on one of his hands were no great burden—on the stouter and more matronly arm of her hostess ; and forthwith disappeared. Attired in the page's dress, she once more sallied into the streets, resolved not to return without having reached some more satisfactory solution of her doubts than her former expedition had produced. That Hilda was alive, and was with the Earl of Essex, she had now a strong suspicion ; that she had been inveigled away, and was forcibly detained by him or by Morven, she was resolved not to believe. To satisfy this doubt was one cause of her expedition ; to relieve her anxiety concerning her lover, and his fidelity and his safety, was another. We do not ask which was the most prominent. She

thought that each was laid in the scales; and the balance was even.

It was a bright Sunday morn. Little thought Isabel how its sun was to set !

With the observances of religion unkept, save in her own customary devotions, she went tremblingly out, and was soon surprised to find her walk so solitary. The streets were quite still : the sun of an early spring, the brightness of the weekly festival, failed to call forth the citizens, who had, unknown to the young stranger, been ordered to keep within doors. But as she approached Essex House, she saw numbers, whom no such loyalty detained, thronging around it. The commotion there caused the now excited girl to quicken her steps : that some imminent danger was at hand, she felt rather than saw. She reached its court just as four officers of the crown, whose appearance had excited the people, or mob, outside it, were obtaining admittance within its gate : clinging close to one of these, as he entered, the innocent-looking boy was swept in with the rest by the pressure of those without, and allowed a passage denied to their other followers.

All at once she saw the Earl of Essex stand before her ;—his face flushed, his proud brow discomposed; passion sweeping over his countenance, and disturbing its once open and resolute expression : and, as he stood conferring with the four great officers of the crown—the Lord Keeper, and the Lord Chief Justice, who were among them, being titles of terror in those days of arbitrary power)—Isabel saw one of the men who had attended her from the presence of Mistress Mary slip into the hand of the unhappy Earl a piece of paper, which he glanced over with redoubled excitement. It contained a few hurried words, as was afterwards known, urging him to instant and prompt measures to provide for his safety. An enemy had done what a friend appeared to do.

Essex returned into his mansion, conducting thither the officers, with whom he deemed conference to be useless.

The door was left open ; the hall, guarded by lines of musketeers, lay before her: but one object appeared at its extremity that blinded the trembling page to all others. There was the young chief of Fitzclare—her Mor-

ven :—fire in his dark eye, impatience on his youthful brow—like the untamed war-horse champing the bit, and pawing the earth—Morven stood there, his drawn sword in his hand, his lip quivering with rage or impatience.

Isabel stretched her arms with a faint cry; but, at the same moment, in obedience to a summons from his Lord, her lover darted from the hall, without having noticed any one.

Wild cries and shouts rose from the Puritanical partisans of the Earl without, for among that sect he had latterly gained much influence, although he was also accused of being too liberal to the Roman Catholics. But the former were the most popular, for the spirit was even then rising which, in the second succeeding reign, was to overthrow both Church and State.

With these cries mingled the voices of others—it might be that some of them were suborned to press on the decisive and fatal moment—“Keep the Lord Keeper in safety! Lock up the great Seal!” While others cried—“Kill them, or they will kill you!”

Terrified at these shouts, not knowing what was about to happen, Isabel sprang within the hall, just as Essex rushed back to it, calling his friends and followers to join him and protect his life. Clinging to his arm was a graceful lady, who sank to his feet as he broke from her grasp—"My Lord—my love—my husband"—she murmured, as the disguised girl recognised Lady Essex.

But among the hundreds of other noble gentlemen whose swords flashed around her, Isabel saw but one. Her little hand was on his arm, her trembling lip refused to utter the name. Morven looked down: his agitated working countenance changed instantly to an expression of intense delight and love. The disguise was not so to him.

"Darling! darling!" without even observing it, he exclaimed, and kissed the trembling lips with rapid, passionate eagerness.

"Thou lovest me still?" she murmured.

"Still? still, and for ever!" he cried—and dear to her afterwards were these last words; while, with another and more hasty kiss, in wild impetuosity he darted after the others, who poured out to the streets, following the

deceived Earl, as, waving his sword around his head, he cried aloud—

“For the Queen ! for the Queen ! good friends ! Her enemies and mine would take my life !”

On they went to the city, crying—

“Down with Cobham : away with Raleigh ! Let honest men guide the councils of our Queen.”

Bewildered, ignorant, remembering only that Morven had been there—sensible only that Morven had gone, Isabel stood motionless on the spot where she had received his last and vehement kiss : the trembling sensation that it was his *last*, was in her heart ; but had that sensation formed itself into a conviction of her understanding, life itself might have been wrung from its seat. That she was quite alone ; that the lately thronged and sword-glittering hall was empty and silent ; that the court was deserted, and the crowd before it had swept after Essex—slowly came to her mind ; but, instead of departing, she went further into the mansion.

The door of an inner and back room was

strongly bolted ; she had heard the voice of the Earl summon her Morven to see that this was done, and, therefore, as connected with him, the circumstance struck her. Almost as she noticed it, she saw the same man who had given her the letter to bear to the lady of the Court come down to the door, and, admitting the attendants of the crown officers, lead them to it, undo the bolts, and bring forth the four great men whom Essex had left, as he thought, in safe keeping, designing to hold them as hostages for his own safety in case of need.

“Traitor ! traitor !” cried the little page ; but at the same time that she uttered the startling cry, terrified at her own boldness, she bounded off, and ran, like a frightened fairy, up the stairs and to the extremity of the mansion, hoping to find a place of concealment till she saw how this strange day would go on.

The door of a remote chamber, that appeared partially dark, was half open, and into it she ran, in terror, lest she were pursued by the base Sir Ferdinando. Her light footsteps were unheard : she came un-

perceived on a scene as startling as all the rest had been, though of a very opposite character.

The room was fitted up as an oratory. On the floor knelt two women, both in deep mourning ; but the attire of one was almost nun-like, and the long veil that covered her head increased that appearance. They were both praying ; but in their hearts, not with their lips.

Trembling, palpitating, Isabel stopped : the figure of one, though wasted by sorrow or illness, was yet full of youth and grace ; the other was matronly. Holding her breath, she crept to the side of the first, and knelt down in silence, whispering only the word—
“ For Morven ! ”

Poor child ! she would have prompted the prayer she interrupted ; for Hilda Fitzclare had not now the strength she once possessed, if she still retained her outward calmness. With a faint cry the folded hands dropped down, and the kneeling page caught the veiled head that was sinking with them.

Lady Leicester, the afflicted mother of Essex—the unhappy wife of Queen Eliza-

beth's first great favourite, the lovingly anxious mother of her next—whose second husband, Sir Christopher Blount, had now gone forth to share the perils, as he had devotedly involved himself in the fate, of his step-son—Lady Leicester rose, looking in wonder, as the seeming page pressed her young friend to his bosom, and covered her pale face with kisses of intense rapture.

“And now thou wilt come to Sir Guy—poor, good Sir Guy,” murmured Isabel amid her caresses.

Hilda lifted up her eyes, and the little maiden shivered at their changed expression. Sweet they might still be—but so lifeless—as if they only looked on to what would not be till life was past.

“I shall come to him when our merciful God pleases, my Isabel.”

“Nay, soon, soon ; for he is ill, sweet Hilda.”

“Christ, in His mercy, hath received him.—Oh ! yes—that hath been so,” said Hilda, closing her eyes—“though it was sudden—dreadful !”

"Hilda—believe you Guy D'Esterre is dead? that he died then?"

"I saw him dead—Symonds made me pass him—dragged me by his lifeless body," cried Hilda, with something of wildness in her look. "And then he said—afterwards when we were in peril at sea—that he saw him—and that wretched Lawrence too—saw them both set fire to the ship—amid flames and flood—he saw them—he said so!"

"Merciful Heaven," said Lady Leicester, "her senses wander."

But Isabel, with a truer instinct, answered and said,

"It was his own conscience, that vile Symonds saw, sweet Hilda; it took the forms of the men he had murdered—murdered one outright, for Lawrence is dead, and in intention murdered the other; but Guy lives. It is not unlikely that Lawrence put in his ship the combustibles that exploded and burned it: and his spirit verily," she added, shuddering, "may have appeared in the storm and flame to the guilty man; but that Sir Guy's did not do, for we kept him safe, and I have got him still to show

to thee; not his ghost, Hilda; but his living self. Not quite so self-willed and bold either, as he was when *thou* hadst him under ward," the little girl concluded, with a significant nod of her head.

Hilda was sitting on the floor; her head had rested on Isabel's lap; now she sat erect, or only leaning her forehead on her hand, which she continually moved over it, as if recalling her dulled senses.

"You do him grievous wrong," she said, in a low, calm voice—"he does *not* live; he is dead. Were he in life, think you," she continued, brightening into animation—"were he in life, would he not have been here? Think you he would join the miserable crew who from selfish fear stand aside, and see their friend and leader driven to self-destruction by falsehood and treachery? Would he see the brother of his plighted wife follow him to the ruin he has madly, though undesignedly, helped to bring upon his Lord?"

"Hilda! Hilda, speak not thus!" shrieked Isabel. "My brain—my heart—will burst! Morven has followed his Lord—that I know;

but he has not led him to ill ; and he shall be saved ! As for your Sir Guy, that he lives, is certain—that he hath long been, and still is, suffering from wounds and sickness, is also true. He hath not had reason for many days, because, I believe, he learned that thou wert burned at sea. See now how thou dost wrong him !—as those always do wrong their friends, who judge hastily from the appearances of a case,” she concluded wisely, and pouting out her lips as if in scorn.

“He lives ! he suffers !” was Hilda’s reply, as, rising up, she drew her veil round her head. “Come, Isabel.” Then turning to Lady Leicester—“I must go now to him—it is my first call,” she said, taking the lady’s hand. “I will still pray beside him for all I leave and love.”

But Isabel crept to the lady’s other side, and, taking that hand between hers, stretched up to the ear of the agitated Countess, and whispered,

“Lady, your husband shares the danger of your noble son, and—and—of my lover : let me stay here with you till tidings come, or they return ?”

The Countess kissed the white forehead that was so innocently raised to her amid its screen of showery and shining hair.

"Thou must don thy cap, then, sweet boy," she said, with a sad smile. "These fair locks assort ill with thy page's dress in such a house as this."

Isabel bent her lips to the hand she held; and their warm repeated pressure closed the brief contract between them.

"Bid one of the serving men to guide thee, beloved Hilda," the lady said. "Be careful—we cannot spare from this bad world one like thee."

The girl she spoke to looked what she could not say: doubt and fear for those she left, mingled with a strange sensation—she could scarcely call it joy—at the thought of even seeing Guy D'Esterre again. The certainty of his living, continuing to live, would have been too sudden a change to have been borne as she bore Isabel's intelligence. But to go to see and tend him on a dying bed was a cause of such deep thankfulness, that in its religious feeling the rush of ordinary emotion was almost absorbed. She stood a mo-

ment in silence at the door, looking back at the room, which she felt she should see no more. It had been to her a sanctuary: there had she often found refuge from the madly troubled scenes, the wild words, the deceit and falsehood, she was forced, within the same house, to see or hear. There she had found a repose that earth had for long refused to yield her; and there she had known that blessed peace which the world in its softest moods cannot give, nor in its cruelest, take away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE deluded Earl of Essex had rushed on, as he had left his mansion, with drawn sword, to the house of his professedly devoted partisan, the sheriff of the city, on whose aid he relied. The preachers, of the Puritan side, who should have been at St. Paul's Cross, he expected, also, would have raised the people in defence of a democratic and popular cause. The preaching had been by law prevented ; the sheriff had conveniently taken himself out of the way. The unfortunate Earl found himself in the snare. The guards had allowed him to pass : no opposition had actually been made to a progress fatal to him, satisfactory to his inveterate foes.

His Queen sat calmly at her dinner, showing the resolution, at this rebellion of her fa-

voured lover, that she had shown to her arch enemy, King Philip of Spain. Her sword was beside her ; but there was no occasion to use it. She would go, she declared, to meet the insurgents : they would flee at the very glance of her eye. It is most probable she might have done so with safety to her royal person ; and how such an adventure might have terminated for the better on the side of the misled Essex, there may be a reasonable doubt.

Opening their eyes to the madness of the enterprise, many of his real friends saved themselves from its consequences ; the mob changed sides.

Long and anxiously had the wife, the mother, and the devoted Isabel, watched for intelligence of the Earl and his followers. Intelligence came not ; but before many hours he came himself—faint, pale, fatigued ; with the wildness of rage and disappointment in his eye. The few, who were but to leave him in death, came with him. Lady Leicester, for a brief space, received back her husband, and Lady Southampton hers, and Lady Essex too : but poor Isabel—alas ! for her !—there was no Morven there.

And for long after—amid the confusion and dismay, the preparations for defence, and talk of surrender upon terms—amid all tumults—went a little page, with flushed cheek and fever-sparkling eyes, through groups of arming men and terrified women, saying but one name ; or, when no voice answered to it, asking to be let out of the barricaded door ; inquiring which way Essex had returned, and where missing ones might be sought.

None heeded the child, until she reached the chief himself, the distracted author and victim of all that was passing. At his feet she knelt down, and holding up her clasped hands—

“For the love of Heaven, and as you hope for rest in it—tell me,” she cried, “is Morven dead, or where is he?”

Essex laid his hand on her cap, and, plucking it off, her hair fell like glittering stream-lets down.

“I knew the sweet face,” he said ; “where is Fitzelare ? hath he, too, deserted me ?”

Isabel sprang up—

“You have left *him*, Earl !” she cried, with

flashing eyes, "not he you ! Trow you Morven of Fitzclare would leave in the hour of distress one he followed in prosperity ?"

"I think not so, my child—no, no !—Christ pardon me, I know not what I say—I discern not friend from foe. My good, faithful, brave Fitzclare ! D'Esterre fell by one murder ; he by another. Hah ! I now remember me—just as we gained the boat there was a shot fired. Fitzclare did not enter it with us !"

"And so he is dead," said Isabel ; and, throwing back the hair from her brow, and walking away, she firmly said—"Better dead than a traitor !"

Poor child ! she spoke words of which she could not then grasp the full meaning. Had her wildly excited state of mind allowed her to do so, the thought that her Morven was dead would have overswept her like the blackest pall that night could draw around mortal sight—blinding her at once to all she had seen, known, loved, believed, or rejoiced in, on this earth. As it was, in her bewilderment she said, with an air of proud indifference—"Better dead than a traitor !"

And now came thundering up to the door of Essex House the great lumbering artillery ; and soldiers, that had not impeded the Earl's walk to the City, were drawn up to lay siege to his mansion. Terrified women, on their knees, besought him to yield, and save himself and them. Essex desired and obtained a two hours' truce, in order to allow of their departure : but there were some who were more willing to share his danger than to leave him to it : and he himself began to entertain the notion of surrender, at first so repugnant to his once dauntless mind.

It was when that question was raised that the high tones of the page's voice was heard from the outer edge of the throng around him—

“Die sword in hand, good Earl; die as your brave friend would have you die, and not by the sword of Elizabeth !”

“Peace ! pert boy,” said an old man, with a rude blow, “such talk as thine hath brought him to this pass.”

“Aye,” said Sir Christopher Blount, mournfully, “when such words were falsely and deceitfully spoken.”

The question ended as history tells us. The Earl of Essex surrendered to the officers of his Queen on the terms of a "fair trial for himself, and civil treatment for his friends." But our narrative lies with persons concerning whom history has been silent.

In the solemnly silent and deserted room of prayer Isabel spent that dreary night : scarcely praying, poor child—except in the one breathing of her soul for him she watched for : but listening, with strained ear, to every sound ; peering out from its window, hoping vainly for the one still hoped-for object to bless her sight.

The words she had so bravely uttered had died away from her memory : the belief she for a moment thought she entertained—that he was dead—was replaced by a racking anxiety. She now believed, or tried to believe, that Morven, being a stranger to London, had missed his way, and, being too late for the boat, was trying to return by an unfrequented road, so as to escape observation. Thus she waited and watched till it

was nigh noon on the following day : and then tidings came that the Earl and all prisoners, taken the preceding night to Lambeth Palace, were conveyed to the Tower.

The Tower !—a name so full of woe and horror ! Its very sound gave a fictitious strength to the poor child, so weak with fast and watching, and the crushing weight of anxiety and fear. She fled away from the deserted and dreadful mansion—fled back to the house she had left, not very much more than twenty-four hours before, to go through an experience more terrible and strange than all that had as yet marked her short, eventful life.

And our much changed knight, meantime, poor Sir Guy D'Esterre—he was a victim to a foe he had never known before—disease.

The strong man laid weak and wailing in illness is always a pathetic object ; but when the eyes of Hilda Fitzclare, glancing timidly, doubtfully, into the shaded room, first beheld that object, what were her sensations ? Our hearts can tell us much

that neither our lips nor pens can tell to others.

And Guy unclosed his eyes from a short, uneasy slumber, to look up and meet those angel-speaking ones that had first met his gaze when he lay on his rushy couch in the Irish fortress. He looked up, and met them again, and thought, for the first instant, he had passed away into the spirit world, and met there the tender, soul-speaking beam he had believed would never shine so calmly sweet upon him more, while he sojourned in this mortal one.

Their gaze did not kill him, however, though it very nearly did so; nor did he die of fright when his own living, still mortal Hilda knelt down beside the couch he lay on, and, murmuring a low, deep prayer of thankful joy, pressed her lips on his pallid brow, and dropped on his face not the first tears she had shed since that night of horror when she had passed his wounded, insensible body in the passage where the sword of the dastardly Symonds had laid it.

Is it to be wondered at, then, if, before the same twenty-four hours, so terribly passed by little Isabel, had quite expired, Sir Guy

D'Esterre, whether owing to the cares of his lost, and now found again, betrothed, or to those of his active and matronly hostess, was brought round, in a most rapid manner, to himself; and was really to be seen dressed, if not yet strong, and seated on the couch with his head resting on quite another pillow, when, in the afternoon of the next day, the door of the chamber was slowly opened, and, with a step as slow, Isabel, still wearing the page's dress, came in, and, without saying a word to either, sat down on a footstool at their feet: then throwing off her cap, and shaking her head back, as if some band around it hurt her, she passed her hand round the upper part of her forehead, saying only, as she did so—

“The Tower! the Tower!” Then turning to D'Esterre, she asked—“Canst tell me where it is?—wounded! and in the Tower!”

“Poor child! sweet Isabel!” said he, in answer, “what aileth thee, dear one?”

“Ah!” sighed Hilda, “she hath, I fear me, matter of ailment;” and, slipping from her seat to the floor, she drew the little head to her bosom, tenderly as a mother does her

infant's, caressing the bright locks, and whispering words of peace and comfort, mingled with soft tears.

To Isabel's loving heart, in which a portion of Spanish fire was burning, these came down as rain upon the gasping earth : yet still she could say nought save this—"The Tower! wounded, and in the Tower!"—thus repeating the report she had recently heard in addition to the information already recorded.

These words caused D'Esterre to rise up and inquire their meaning. He heard, in answer the frightful narrative Hilda had kept from him till then. His whole frame quivered from head to foot : he shook as if in palsy, or an ague fit.

"And I have lain here," he cried, when words could come, "like a sick girl, a puling child!—O Hilda, now that I have regained my love that was lost, it seems to me I have been weak—foolish——"

"It was because thou wast weak beforehand," said Hilda, soothingly, "that the tidings of my loss did so overthrow what strength thou hadst left. And that weakness was not thy fault, since it was but the result of thy wounds."

"But now I am well," said Guy, wiping the damps of illness and agitation from his forehead—"I am well, and must go forth. Would to Heaven I had but been in Essex House!"

"Thou wouldst ere now have been, in that case, in the Tower also," said Hilda, "and we should then have had none to help, none to protect us :—ah! are we not selfish, Guy?"

But poor Isabel, starting up, ran over to him, and, like a child to its father, cast herself on his neck, clasping her arms round it.

"Guy, good, sweet Sir Guy, come with me to the Tower!—they will let you in. Oh! take me there!"

His chest heaved beneath her face; he bent his eyes upon her head, leaving a tear on the soft hair. He was rising up, when Hilda drew near, not jealously, but with fond anxiety.

"Ah! Isabel, is not thy lover also my brother—the only son of my mother—my last relative on earth? Pity poor Hilda!"

Isabel exchanged her resting-place: she

too had felt as if neither Hilda nor D'Esterre, in their new-found joy, could sympathize in her unequalled sorrow : when she knew this was not so, she mingled tears with hers, and grew calmer : for she felt Hilda was a sister as well as a betrothed wife.

“ Oh !” cried Guy, “ could I but put foot in stirrup !”

“ We will tend thee so well that thou shalt soon do so,” said his betrothed, prophetically.

And her words came true.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE trial of Essex was over. At its close the edge of the executioner's axe was turned towards the condemned, in symbolic interpretation of the verdict.

The noble Earl, with his devoted friend, Southampton, and his step-father, Sir Christopher Blount, returned from Westminster Hall to the Tower, to await its stroke.

On walked the terrible officer of the law, bearing the axe with its edge turned to the noble prisoner. After him marched the gallant Essex—his head declined, his pace rapid, as if he would hasten to the death that was less galling to his proud spirit than such a moment—led back to the fatal Tower, to be slaughtered there, instead of falling, as his soul desired, sword in hand.

Many pressed to see him ; the citizens, moved with love and compassion for one who had the rare fate of being, at one time, the peculiar favourite of a sovereign and of a people also, would have stayed his progress. He never raised his head, nor cast one look around.

There was a cry from a single voice issuing from the crowd ; it echoed his own war-cry on the field of Zutphen—his maiden field—where the young, brave noble led the charge, crying—“ For the honour of England, my fellows, follow me ! ”—“ And then,” saith old Stowe, “ throwing his lance into rest, he overthrew the first man, and with his curtelax did so behave himself, as it was wonderful to see.” That cry now burst from his follower in that field, Guy D'Esterre, as, with rattling sword, and unknowing at the moment what purpose he had in view, he sprang forward among the throng.

A pair of strong arms were flung around him, and forcibly held him back.

“ Art mad ?—stark mad ? ” said the voice of old Anster.

But Essex turned his head : his hasty

footsteps stopped, as his own battle-cry rang on his ear : he saw D'Esterre struggle to pierce the crowd ; a smile, more bitterly proud than sorrowful, played round his lip ; but a movement of the head was at once expressive of a desire to repress his friend's impetuosity, and to bid him a final farewell.

“ Good, brave D'Esterre ! had I had a few more such men as thee around me !” he said, in a low, hoarse tone, as Guy, breaking from Anster's grasp, reached his side. “ Thou livest,” the Earl added, in a manner scarcely indicative of surprise,—“ live for the noble Hilda ; better that than to seek to share the death of Essex !”

He passed : and the glory of the world seemed for the moment to have passed for ever from the regard and admiration of our knight. This was its end:—led into the shambles, like the beasts that perish !

Essex was followed to the Tower by the royal chaplain, Dove, whom Elizabeth, in her fondness for symbolic titles for her pets, called her Dove with silver wings. But the silver wings flapped rather more rudely in the presence of the state prisoner than in that of his

regal mistress. His efforts to force the unhappy Earl to a confession of crimes of which he was innocent were ably seconded by one of those ministers whose exhortations he had attended to, and who might, indeed, have had a full cognizance of all his proceedings, and been instrumental in checking, instead of stimulating them. Essex, in his grief, sought spiritual help from this man, who, ere he came to his former patron, had joined the cause that prevailed, and was employed by the base Cecil and his party to work on his spiritual fears, in order to draw from him the sort of confession they wished for.

D'Esterre saw him thus left without one friend or follower in whom he could confide, surrounded only by malicious foes, or time-serving, mercenary persons; and the anguish, the grief, and shame that rent his heart, only received additional poignancy from the gratitude he had lately felt for the rescue of his betrothed Hilda, by the noble daring of his gallant, but now fallen leader.

As the quick-witted little Isabel surmised, the wretched Lawrence, not foreseeing that the only person to whom on earth he had

felt any attachment would be taken on board the ship which Symonds had hired for the conveyance of himself and his ill-gotten wealth to England, had placed combustibles in the hold, which he knew would effect the vengeance he longed for.

It was, therefore, with redoubled horror that he had seen Hilda Fitzclare accompany the captain of that doomed ship to the house where he pretended Sir Guy D'Esterre waited to see her, and where she was, as he knew, met by Symonds instead ; by whom she was immediately to be conveyed on board the vessel. Lawrence was on his road to seek for help to rescue her, when his meeting with D'Esterre occurred ; and, anxious to save time, he returned with him.

The fire took place at sea, as the partially foiled avenger had planned : by the light of its flames, Essex and Morven Fitzclare saw a calm, noble form kneeling at the stern, and while flame and smoke drifted from her, almost happy looked that pale, beautiful face. Together they went to the rescue ; and they saved her only. Hilda shuddered when she alluded to the rest ; for the

end of the miserable Symonds, and his wicked associate, the captain, were to her too dreadful to think or tell of.

From her, Essex and Morven heard Sir Guy D'Esterre had been killed: she had seen him—been dragged by his apparently lifeless body,—only just touching the cold, white brow of the only man she ever had loved, ever would love again. Twice had Morven written to Isabel, but communications sent from Essex House to Ireland were narrowly watched, and Isabel had never received letter or message either from him or Hilda.

From Lady Essex and Lady Leicester she had met the tenderest care and sympathy; and, in participating their anxieties and sorrows, she found the only relief to her own which the world at that time could give her.

The early attachment that had existed between the Earl and Guy D'Esterre had suffered loss in later years by the widely different course of life they pursued. Guy had learned to pity the royal pet, almost as much as he had admired and loved the daring and noble soldier. In Ireland he

had latterly found his counsel, and even his presence, were more avoided than sought for, while young Fitzclare's were evidently more congenial to their lord. But if early affection had been deadened, it was not utterly dead; and Hilda's simple and touching narrative was more than enough to relume it into even greater fervour. Anster's stout arms, but still more the calm soldierly voice Guy had in childhood obeyed, and in manhood respected, checked the rash impulse that might have placed our steady-going knight in the same fatal quarters with his doomed chief.

We now look in on our little group, as it draws towards the evening of a day that had been an oppressively anxious and cruel one. That group is a tearful or silent one. Worn out with passionate emotion, Isabel sat on a cushion, with her head resting on Hilda's knee: the fair, pure cheek, though flushed, was marked by the "water-courses" which grief had made. If she did not sleep, her brain, at least, found rest in the stupor to which it yielded. Her long bright hair—undressed, uncared for, hung down—like the glorious

bough broken off in its verdure, trailing its luxuriant branches reversed to the ground.

Hilda and Sir Guy, looking alternately at her and at one another, spoke in low tones.

"Oh! my Hilda!" he groaned, "were it not that I had thee, what would life, in such a world, be worth to me!"

"Thou mightest—I trust, by God's grace thou wouldst—spend it more entirely, perhaps more holily, in seeking to gain another," she whispered.

"Essex!" he cried again, starting, shivering, as he did when he recalled the reality of his fate—"the block!—that noble spirit to be sent forth so!"

"And we, too, friend," she said, pressing a hand on his shoulder, and speaking with assumed selfishness, as she did when restraining the convulsive emotion which she sometimes feared might break out into acts, as well as words, of dangerous excitement—"forget you our griefs, our anxieties for Morven?"

"God knoweth he is ever in my thoughts, my loved one," replied Sir Guy, who, if the truth were known, had not divested those

thoughts of some tincture of bitterness against his hot-headed comrade, who, knowingly, or by mere native recklessness, had, he believed, increased the grounds of suspicion and complaint against the beleaguered Earl.

“All this day I have sought intelligence of him : some say he was lodged in the Tower, others, not ; and some, who ought to know, vouchsafe no answer : were I sure he was there, I should better know what to do ; but I fear lest, if he have escaped, such inquiries should only implicate him.”

Isabel, who had seemed in stupor, if not sleep, raised up her head, the brown eyes, too brilliant even in their languor, looking with a wandering air to his face, and, like one over-drugged by narcotics, she said—

“Who was that warrior of old time, who took the cross and went to the Holy Land to fight the infidels?”

They looked at her apprehensively.

“I have heard the tale”—she went on—
“how the Paynim, or some wicked giant, caught him as he wandered home to his lady love, and shut him up in a great tower,

like to Elizabeth's ; and his true love went wandering too, in minstrel's garb, singing from castle to castle, and tower to tower, till her true knight heard the voice he loved, and answered back again : and so she wrought his deliverance."

"Thy fantasy, sweet one, has made or changed the tale," said Hilda.

"It is of the Lion-hearted Richard thou wouldst speak, fair maid," said Guy, "and of his minstrel, Master Blondell."

"So, perchance, may the books you have read set forth the story," Isabel replied, curling her lip ; "but I have read it far more truly. Many such things are said to have been done by a minstrel, or a page ; yet well I wot the hearts that beat beneath those doublets were not the hearts of men."

She rose up as she spoke, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE declining sun of a bright cold day in spring cast its beams of glory even on the grim and blood-stained Tower of London ; shedding a ghastly radiancy, and seeming to fall with a strange smile, on its horrible decorations—the mouldering human heads that garnished what was then the royal lodging of a woman and a Queen.

The young page who, boy-like, strolled round those dreaded walls, had already passed a goodly number of “the human face divine,” mouldering away in various stages of decay, to that of the skeleton. Some two or three hundred of these are said by sage historians and foreign visitors to have been ranged on old London Bridge for the edification or warning of passers-by. On the

Tower, and around the regal apartments of Queen Elizabeth, they presented to the little wanderer only the realization of her own childish notions. Yet she shuddered, as her eye, glancing from one prison window to another, fell upon those ghastly symbols of the traitors' doom. All at once, as that eye wandered in aching anxiousness from tower to tower, she heard her name pronounced softly, yet deeply. Isabel stood: with folded hands and upraised face, she stood, waiting as if to hear a voice that was not of earth. She was beside that building still named Essex Tower, and saw a countenance much paler, more care-worn, than it had been in the bright days of yore, with the troubled expression that bespoke a tortured mind—a mind kept on the rack by the spiritual or temporal torturers who sought to extract from him the desired confession, which they afterwards affirmed was obtained—but still she knew the noble face of Essex.

Surrounded only by enemies, without one friend or attendant about him, in whose truth he could confide, the young, daring Earl was now left a prey to all the vile deceit

and corrupt principle which characterized the great men who formed the cabal against him, and whose names have, notwithstanding these vices, contributed to shed a lustre on the reign of "the good Queen Bess."

"Isabel," Essex whispered in Spanish, "seek you Fitzclare?"

"Yes," she answered, "tell me, good Earl, how to seek, how to save him?"

"Alas! sweet child! would to Heaven my life, my death, might restore him to thee! Hark ye, Isabel"—he paused, glancing at the ring he always wore—"I have thought—I have scorned—to sue for life, for liberty—did I even wish to do so, I am too well beset with foes that the message should not miscarry. Our talk must be short:—meeting thee decides me." He drew the ring from his exquisitely formed hand. "Bear this, my child, to the palace, ask for my cousin, Lady Scrope, and bid her give it to Elizabeth, and say Essex sends it to claim her service 'in memory of affection that hath been.'"

He dropped the ring from the window, and a hasty movement of his head announced

that the interview must abruptly close ; but following the direction which she, with her mind intent on one thought, believed that movement indicated, she arrived, not by the guidance of the Earl's head so much as that of her own heart, beneath the narrow chamber that imprisoned the impetuous, impatient young chieftain of Fitzclare.

There he was : changed, pallid, with fever-burning eyes ; his face pressed close to the iron bars, through which his wild spirit longed to fly free. The young lovers were too widely separated for words to pass. But she saw him, gazed on him : her outstretched arms fell crossed on her breast : her brown eyes, no longer glancing merrily in youthful glee, looked up to Heaven in such an ecstasy of thankfulness, that tears rushed to those of the poor prisoner. He lifted a finger in the same direction, to indicate a hope of a reunion there above. That sign was the most quickening to Isabel. Not there alone should they meet, if it depended upon her. She raised her open hand, and showed him, in its palm, the glistening, well-known ring of his Lord ; a movement of her head towards his

tower, at the same time, explaining that she had got it from him.

Morven slightly started at its sight; then beckoned in the direction of the palace; and Isabel, readily comprehending he desired her to speed on her errand, with another expressive gesture of love, joy, sorrow, blent in one, darted away, ran, nimble as a young antelope, down the hill, and speeding to the water-side, took boat, and made off to the palace of the great Queen.

When she reached it, the hour of the Royal Maid's supper was drawing on. The noise of kettle-drums, and other instruments of martial music, which played for her delectation during the repast, announced that all was in readiness. The hall was, as usual, thronged with attendants and spectators, and among them the little page easily entered.

To ask for Lady Scrope, who, being one of the ladies of the bed-chamber, would readily be found, appeared to her an easy matter. But when the moment for inquiry came, she found it not so easy to get an answer; for just the persons she addressed

were those who had no power, or perhaps inclination, to give it.

"The Lady Scrope! seek you the Lady Scrope, sir page?" said a bland voice that thrilled her with fear. She started, turned round, and saw Mistress Mary behind her.

"Shall I find her for thee? or may I bear her thy message?" asked the lady, who, for reasons, perhaps, of her own, seemed resolved not to recognise her former visitor. Relieved by this apparent forgetfulness, and believing it to be real—for a great Court lady, living in such crowds, might so easily forget such a little thing as she—Isabel, looking down, answered that she was charged to deliver a token to the Lady Scrope, and wished to give it into her own hand.

"Know you the Lady Scrope by sight, fair boy? If so, you may spy her out amid the dames who bear the dishes to her Grace," was the artful rejoinder.

"Nay, I am but a stranger, and have never seen her yet."

"'Tis well: I will send her to thee: if thy errand be secret," she added, in a lower, confidential tone, "better withdraw a space

from the crowd; wait thou near the door, and when a lady comes direct to thee there, thou canst know that she is the lady thou seekest."

Isabel bowed in silence, and posted herself in a retired spot. About a quarter of an hour passed; and then a lady and gentleman entered the hall together: the lady came straight up to her, and in a low voice, and with evident, but suppressed agitation, said,—

"Hast thou an errand to me? If so, do it speedily."

The seeming page at once put the ring of Essex into her hand.

"Bear this," says my Lord of Essex, 'to the Queen Elizabeth; say the Earl doth send it to her, and claims her service in memory of the affection that hath been.'"

The lady closed her hand over the ring. Her lips moved almost convulsively, but Isabel beheld in the quivering motion an evidence only of pity and love for the cousin she was employed to save. The lady turned away in silence, and rejoined her husband, the Earl of Nottingham, who had come to

the hall with her, and at whose desire, instigated by Mistress Mary, the Countess had personated her gentle sister, Lady Scrope.

The little page left the hall with a lightened heart: the noisy regal supper-room, where kneeling ladies offered the dishes to their Queen, had no charms for one who had come from the Tower of London. She believed the ring to be safely on its way to the royal mistress of the condemned Earl: with the easy transition of a child from tears to smiles, little Isabel's heart was now filled with laughter; instead of ghastly grinning skulls, she saw around her forms of life, and grace, and beauty: her jocund Morven; the noble, free-spoken Lord they all loved; these would soon be free, be saved—and then they should all flee away to some fair flowery land, more adapted to the bright fairy fire-fly that Morven loved, than was stern England, or miserable, blood-stained Ireland.

Thus did the poor child's thoughts rush on in visions rapid as her steps,—wild, alas! as the blood that was, unknown to herself, bounding too madly in her veins. Isabel's

nerves had been strained too high ; the tension would not hold. When she rejoined Hilda Fitzclare, she knew not what she said. She was like one inebriated. She laughed aloud ; she talked of all kinds of pleasant things : she invited Sir Guy to join in a Spanish dance, and believed Essex and Morven to be her observers. Then, all at once, the human heads she had seen became partners in the dance, and the loud discordant music she had heard in the royal supper-room was that to which they moved.

Shrieking fearfully, the poor girl cast herself into Hilda's arms : they saw she was seized with fever, and, unable to comprehend any part of what had happened, they found only a new, but not quite unexpected, cause of anxiety and care open before them.

Poor Isabel lay long ill and delirious ; at times D'Esterre thought it might be well for her to pass thus unconsciously away from this wicked world. But Hilda clung to her child ; and not only from earthly love did she seek to detain her, but from feeling how dreadful it is to pass from time to eternity unconscious of the awful transit.

Thus she prayed for her darling's restoration—her restoration at least to a condition to be able to pray for herself—that, through the mercy of the Redeemer, her short, not sinful life might only be cut off from earth to be lengthened in heaven.

And while Isabel lay unconscious of the shocks of this strange life, the Earl of Essex passed away from it—that daring, proud, rash spirit was thrust forth within the secret precincts of the Tower. He wished, said his judges, to die in private.

“Nay,” said Guy D’Esterre, forestalling the words of Henry IV. of France—“nay, his mind was clean the contrary. There was nought he would have liked more than to die in the sight of all men.”

Sir Walter Raleigh had stood by to witness the execution of Sir Christopher Blount and Danvers ; thus giving to some persons occasion rather to triumph than to pity, when he experienced himself the fate he rejoiced to have brought upon Essex and his friends. Many of the latter had bought their pardons from him and others at immense prices ; for

in the days of good Queen Bess justice and mercy were saleable things.

Lord Mountjoy had been sent to Ireland in the place of Essex, and was "putting down the rebels with a high hand;" was, in fact, completing a conquest of that country, which, though for centuries the scene of war and strife with England, never was conquered before. His interest, engaged by Sir Guy D'Esterre, had been quietly exerted on behalf of the young chieftain of Fitzclare, and had succeeded so far as to save him, hitherto, from the dishonourable death which other active followers of the ill-fated Earl had met.

A thousand-fold more than all this passed while Isabel lay tossing on her fevered couch, uttering all sorts of wild and pleasant fantasies; or fearfully raving of betrothals within the Tower; of skeletons for the company; of a ring put on her hand by a headless man. Then Elizabeth of England would be the plighted bride, and the ring would be placed on her finger, and she in return would strike off the head of her lover, and walk away, hugging it, bleeding, to her breast.

Then the Queen she would see madly dancing, and hear loud music playing to drown the dying sob of her lover. The old figure, playing and dancing with the bleeding head in her arms, was a sight that appeared constantly to come before the young girl's diseased vision : strange it was, but not far from reality.* For in some such way passed in the Court of Elizabeth the moment of Essex's death.

On that fatal Ash-Wednesday—the day of penitence—she was playing an instrument of music when the head of the victim of her maidenly fondness rolled to the dust beneath the axe. Isabel saw frightful things in delirium, but there was a reality in their frightfulness.

The death of Essex appeared to be the grateful sop thrown to the spirit of cruelty, and the thirst for human blood was checked by it. The Earl of Southampton was spared, and only kept in imprisonment in the Tower : a similar lot was, for the present, that also of poor Isabel's young lover, who, in inten-

* She is said, though probably not with truth, to have kept his skull in her cabinet.

tion and inclination at least, had been more guilty against Elizabeth of England.

Wildly, almost madly, had the dark-eyed lady of the Court danced on the eve of the execution of Lord Essex ; but on the evening of the day when he died, and not long after the tidings came, even as her royal mistress was amusing herself by playing the virginals, she, too, died—how, it was not explained, as an inquest did not enlighten the curious.

Sadly stern was the broad brow of Sir Guy D'Esterre : deeply in his heart did he forswear Courts and Court favour. To retire from a service grown distasteful to him, and, on his own paternal domains, to have Hilda Fitzclare for his companion, friend, and wife, formed now the summit of his desires. He had seen his admired and gallant friend and leader fall, the victim to jealousy and his own hot ambition, when he had not lived quite three and thirty years. Sir Guy had himself attained the mature age of twenty-eight ; his life had passed easily, pleasantly enough, till his service in unhappy Ireland drew him into a series of adventures, which he had ceased to consider troubles, since

they had given him the love of Hilda Fitzclare. But this last shock made him, in aspect and in feeling, an older and a graver man.

While the ancient Queen was exposing her tottering figure in constant dancing, and causing foreign ambassadors to write marvellous accounts of the frolicsomeness of "the dreaded and dreadful Queen of England," he and his betrothed spent the time in solitary mourning; either in ministering what consolation they could give to the afflicted mother and wife whose husband and son perished together; or in attending to the loving, pathetically afflicted girl, whose wandering talk brought constantly before them all that was horrible, terrible, and woeful, mingled up with the more touching words of brightness and gladness that told of themes more natural to the young patient's past life and happy heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AND little Isabel only partially awoke from her long nightmare, to find herself in a changed scene, and to appear to other eyes herself a changed creature.

She was then in one of those fine baronial-looking houses—half mansion half castle, which our Norman ancestors raised on the fair domains of England. The old towers still remained, but the rest of the house was of a later date ; and close beside it, with its slender spire rising amid the noble trees, was the church, which was attached as a necessary appendage to it, and a connecting link between the Lord of the great house and the peasants of the cottages that were grouped or scattered at some intervals around. Quaint but stately gardens on three sides adorned the mansion, and in front

a noble terrace overlooked the winding river and wide-spread park.

Within its walls Sir Guy D'Esterre dwelt with his newly wedded wife. Their marriage, unlike most others of the age, had taken place so quietly that their poor little patient knew nothing of it. Isabel was brought there by Guy and Hilda in their bridal train, without feeling the jarring contrast of their joy and her sorrow. That joy, indeed, was rather a deep-felt and holy happiness, which did not supersede a silent, solemn sadness; and Isabel, if she perceived that Hilda was happy, did not even inwardly reproach her for it.

Poor child ! She had passed a terrible crisis : she came out of it not only changed in looks and manners, but with a brain scarcely restored to its full and proper action. She had grown somewhat taller, and her features had attained a womanly softness of expression ; while her sweet face, without losing its child-like innocence, wore an air so inexpressibly touching, that it seemed as if her heart was always full of tears that never, never flowed. She was so calm, so quiet, so unlike herself.

Adjoining the domains of D'Esterre was

the abode of the beautiful and sorrowful Lady Leicester ; who, whatever might have been the scandal related of her earlier life, retired, after the execution of her second husband and her noble son, to retirement, and led the life which is recorded in her epitaph :—

“ She that in her youth had been
Darling to the Maiden Queen,
Till she was content to quit
Her favour for her favourite,*
Whose gold thread, when she saw spun,
And the death of her brave son,†
Thought it safest to retire
From all care and vain desire,
To a private country cell,
Where she spent her days so well,
That to her the better sort
Came, as to a holy Court;
And the poor that lived near,
Dearth nor famine could not fear.”

And to this sorrowful lady did young Isabel attach herself, and at her feet she

* The Earl of Leicester is here intended, the lover of Elizabeth, whom this beautiful Lettice, who was the original of Amy Robsart, married, to the lasting displeasure of her enamoured Queen.

† The Earl of Essex, the step-son of Leicester ; for the two most renowned lovers of Elizabeth stood in that relationship to each other.

would sit, leaning her fair head upon the lady's knees, and ever murmuring the words—"Better dead than a traitor!" for her mind, oblivious of many things, and resting only on the scene in Essex House, retained the belief that Morven had died with his Lord. Neither Sir Guy nor Hilda would disturb this idea, believing the girl's mind was more at rest in entertaining it than might be the case under the tortures of suspense.

Happiness, if true, is ever diffusive ; Sir Guy's desire to restore happiness to its seemingly native seat in the young maiden's lightsome heart was fully equal to his fair bride's anxiety for the safety of her brother.

Thus, one morn, as they came arm in arm along the path that led them from the church, at that time unspoiled by the profane violence of later days, where they had prayed together as one in faith as in heart—he said to her—

"I must leave thee, love, for awhile ; hard though it is to disturb so soon the domestic life to which thou dost so sweetly train me. I must journey to yon vast Babel, and learn how matters are like to go with Morven."

"God speed thy way, sweet husband," was Hilda's reply, while her heart trembled at

the thought of another parting after all the dangers they had experienced.

"Heaven will send thee back to me, since thou goest on a work of charity ; for our Isabel cannot long continue thus."

"Beloved, have not our hearts always kept thought with thought ? Thou wast thinking even as I have been doing," he responded.

"Yes, Guy, but I was not so strong as thou, and could not speak the first."

They entered the court of their house ; and as they did so, the rapid clatter of horse's feet was heard galloping towards it : in a minute, a rider, besplashed and hot, cast himself from a half-dead steed, and cried aloud, and with due importance—

"Ho ! From the Queen ! These, with speed, for the hands of Sir Guy D'Esterre !"

"I am he," said D'Esterre, approaching the reeling courier ; "what wilt thou with me ?"

The royal messenger handed him a small paper, with the customary endorsement—"Ride ! Ride ! Ride !"—betokening the necessity of haste.

"He must appear before her Majesty forthwith," said the man, adding more im-

portance still to his message by this notification to Hilda.

The words fell like the final knell of life upon her ear.

"Now then, at last, all is over. We die together," she murmured.

"Nay, not until, I trust, we shall have lived longer together," cried Guy. "Silly one! the letter is written by the good Lady Scrope, who, thou knowest, though the cousin and constant advocate of our noble friend, is also the familiar and confidential friend of the Queen. Methinks her continued favour to that lady shows that at heart she has grieved for the bloody act she sanctioned."

"But art thou not summoned to Court?"

"Yea, and thyself also; 'and our guest, or follower, maiden, or page,' saith the missive, 'who brought a ring to the palace on a certain day.' Good sooth, I comprehend it not."

"Ah! she oft has spoken wildly of a ring," said Hilda; "it is Isabel, doubtless."

The recollection of the ring he had seen the Queen place on the finger of Essex, and of the words she spoke, occurred to Sir Guy; and he related that scene to his wife.

The royal summons was as urgently as

briefly expressed; and no time was lost by our party in obeying it, for intense anxiety quickened their diligence.

The first sight of London seemed at once to restore to Isabel the perfect use of memory; but the recollection of the facts of the case broke upon her so gradually that she was herself unconscious of her former obliviousness; and it was only by the change in her mode of speaking that her friends became aware that she knew of her lover being alive, and a prisoner of state.

Lady Scrope received them with a mournfully mysterious manner. The intelligence she gave them, while it relieved Hilda's fears for her husband, excited their astonishment and interest. She told them how, some time previously, her sister, the Countess of Nottingham, lying at the point of death, and being, like herself, a lady of the royal bed-chamber, had sent for the Queen to visit her, and, being troubled in conscience, had confessed to having personated her sister, and intercepted a ring sent by their cousin, Essex, to their mutual kinswoman and sovereign, Elizabeth.

The paroxysm of fury, in which the latter had struck the dying woman, and withheld the implored forgiveness, gave place to as violent a grief, which it was pretended at Court had for its cause the death of the Countess: this again had settled down into a deplorable remorse and melancholy. The fictitious gaiety that had lasted for some time after signing the death-warrant of her spoiled young favourite, ended then for ever; and the great, lion-hearted Elizabeth was now in a condition to be pitied by her lowest, meanest subject.

Still under the influence of her famous astrologer, Dee, and with a mind excited by a belief in conjuring arts, she was now beset with spectral visions; among which she fancied she was able to see her own body standing upright amid fierce devouring flames. Spirits and hideous fantasies haunted her bed, and denied her rest.

Harrington has, indeed, recorded her aspect previous to this time; but at one also when her conscience had awakened, and the delusion with which human vanity had enwrappt her began to give way. And well is

it — whatever terrors may encompass the awful moment—that conscience should so arouse itself ere the soul of man returns to the God that gave it ! Then the renewing Spirit moves over its own defiled, defaced work. The mortal life that is ending is placed beside the Life of the Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us, to teach us how to live. Holiness and unholiness are seen side by side : the startled soul turns from the Light that makes its darkness visible, to gaze on the death of the Just One. Faith comes to aid the work of penitence : ventures to lay a trembling hand on the Cross of Him who gave that Life an offering for sinners ; listens to the prayer that was uttered on the Cross, and is ever repeated in heaven—“ Father, forgive them ; ” —and in humble love responds—“ Lord, remember me ! ”

The pathetic description given of Queen Elizabeth's sufferings of mind by her godson, Sir John, would make us desire to know that through such tribulations, she, who through life had been so renowned, found

in death the peace of penitence, and the rest of humble faith. "She asked," saith Sir John Harrington, "if I had seen Tyrone," and when I replied that I had seen him with the Lord Deputy in Ireland, meaning Essex, "she smote her breast, and dropped a tear. She held in her hand a golden cup, which she oft put to her lips ; but, in sooth, her heart seemeth too full to lack more filling."

The charm to prolong life, which she had lately worn, appeared—possibly by the device of her false courtiers, who were only anxious for the accession of James of Scotland—to increase her nervous maladies.

The closing scene was drawing on more rapidly than her cruel flatterers would allow her to perceive if it depended on their arts : but death seldom allows his awful approach to be insensible. Elizabeth had desired a true looking-glass to be presented to her, for till that late hour false and flattering ones had been used ; and then had seen the real, old, withered countenance, which she had believed inspired young courtiers with such passionate love. She then saw the falsity of those who were raving of "despised

love," even as the aged woman had numbered the allotted term of mortal life. But more than this had she seen, in another mirror which the Spirit of Truth presented. Yet, at first, her pride yielded not ; and amid weeping, groaning, sighing, she long refused to show her secret pain to any spiritual guide or temporal friend ; still, with the spirit of the Tudor, saying, she knew " nothing on earth worthy to trouble *her*."

Lady Scrope had orders to admit Sir Guy D'Esterre and the inmates of his family to her presence, for the truth of the story concerning the ring she had given Essex she had resolved to learn. The lady left him in the anteroom, from whence he could see what passed, and led Hilda and Isabel through it.

As they reached the open door of an inner drawing-room in the Palace of Richmond, a low, moaning sound was heard. Before them, crouched amid cushions of scarlet and gold, was a sad spectacle for feeling hearts. An aged woman, with an elaborately dressed, jewelled, but disarranged periwig, half lay, half sat, as if in fear while no one was at hand : but at the

sound of coming feet, that look of inward fear removed ; she raised her head boldly, and, with a loud, fierce exclamation, demanded who the intruders were. Lady Scrope, knowing that her failing memory, or her painfully occupied thoughts, often made her forget the orders she had given, advanced and told her.

A succession of deep sighs, a long sad silence, followed. Her failing mind wandered away, or returned to its former illusion.

“I would rise up,” murmured the Queen, “but I am tied fast—I have a collar of iron round my neck !”

Hilda shuddered ; even her husband, who stood apart at some distance, slightly trembled : but little Isabel—impelled by an instinct they did not share, and in happy ignorance of Court laws—went straight up to the cushions, and kneeling down, bowed her fair head towards the nearly prostrate form, till the long bright hair swept along them.

“Burst that iron yoke, O Queen,” she cried, “by loosing the prisoner’s chain, and letting the captive go free. Give me back

my betrothed husband — my imprisoned lover !”

Elizabeth laid her once beautiful hand on the young head. She held up the long tresses, and let them slowly and separately drop.

“So was Elizabeth once,” she murmured, —“and hast thou a lover too, at sixteen years of age?”—and sighs followed, recalling, as she did, her earliest, perhaps her only real love—and first beheaded one—Sir Thomas Seymour.

Isabel beckoned Hilda to approach, and motioned her to kneel beside her. She did, so, but prayed in her heart—“Heaven have mercy on this soul ! In the hour of death and in the day of judgment, Good Lord deliver us.”

The pure, almost holy, loveliness of the one ; the seraph-like countenance of the other, as their forms bent over the old, dying Queen, formed a subject for the painter.

But the weakened, wandering mind reverted to the one sad thought.

“Give him back !—release him !—vain

child—he is dead—dead—dead !” Elizabeth wildly exclaimed.

“Have you, then, killed him ?” cried the girl, starting up with fire-flashing eyes. “O base——”

Hilda interrupted the word by forcibly plucking her down again to her side, and Lady Scrope, advancing with dignity, said—

“Peace ! presumptuous girl. Her Highness speaks not of him thou meanest.”

“I thirst !” murmured the Queen, “my neck pains me—it is tied—bound in iron.”

The lady knelt, and held a cup to her lips ; and then, in soft accents, reminded her of Isabel’s story, telling her also who Hilda was.

“Thou art, then, she of the Irishry whom he brought over to us,” said Elizabeth, indignantly. “Wert thou his paramour ?”

Hilda started ; the proud blood dyed her pure face and brow. But her mind moved in a sphere too high to resent the coarse supposition.

“The gallant Earl of Essex saved me from perishing at sea,” she replied ; “I was then betrothed to Sir Guy D’Esterre, whose wife I now am.”

“Hah ! they have lied to me : foully lied. Is it not written—‘Put not your trust in princes’?—but in whom shall princes put *their* trust? Base deceivers and flatterers have they all been to me.”

Many moans, sighs, and complaints, mingled with wandering words concerning visions of terror, followed this speech.

“Innocent child,” she said, “innocent child, what dost thou here? Get thee home; get thee home.”

Lady Scrope continued to recall her to the subject she had left; and gave such a lovely description of young Isabel’s devotion; of her risking herself in page’s attire to seek her lover, who attended Essex; of her interview with the Earl, and boldness in doing his message at the Palace,—that tears rained fast down the cheeks of the great Elizabeth—tears, not a little augmented by the pathetic message of the man she had so foolishly loved: and, while poor Isabel, in surprise, humility, and confusion, listened to her own praise, and hung her head, abashed at her late audacity, the Queen, closing the eyes that alternately flashed with frenzied passions,

and melted with better emotions, startled them all by the blessed words—

“Take, then, the pardon of thy lover—hie thee to the Tower, and bear him thence. And mind ye, maiden, get thee married—for so — alackaday !—so thou shalt escape much cause for grief.”

“And ever, ever—yea, seven times a day, will we both pray for thee !” cried Isabel, bending her weeping, joyful face on the Queen’s hand. But the assurance was not received as she expected.

“What ! think ye we need such intercession ? Truly we are not yet past praying for ourselves when prayer is needed.”

“Christ love and pity and bless thee,” murmured the girl, unconscious of what was said in the tumult of her emotions, and covering her hand with kisses—“Christ in His mercy receive thee !”

Perhaps the once formidable Elizabeth of England, in her failing heart, added an Amen to the prayer ; but the Lady Scrope, fearful of a change in the temper of her royal kinswoman, interposed, and conveyed both Hilda and Isabel, weeping tears of grateful joy,

back to the ante-room where D'Esterre awaited them anxiously ; and where she speedily brought to them the officer commissioned to attend them to the Tower, and order the release of Morven Fitzclare ; granting him a pardon clogged only by the condition that he never should set foot in Ireland more ; “lest,” said the Queen, he should again “stir up strife with that thief Tyrone.”

Not a word was spoken as the barge glided down the Thames towards the bloody Tower. Isabel leaned over its side, appearing to count the ripples in the water. Guy and Hilda, hand in hand, might have conversed without words. His brow was stern and sad as he entered its gates.

Their guide led them at once to the captive chieftain's chamber. Young Fitzclare was seated at a table ; his arms lay upon it ; his face was upon them. He would not look up when his door opened, for he was in an ill mood, and cared not to see his keeper. The soft arms of his little love around his neck, a warm cheek laid close to his ; a panting

form whose heaving emotions were felt : these made him look up to clasp his wild young betrothed to his rebounding heart.

And Guy and his wife looked on while the maiden lay pale, silent, like a tired child, upon his breast.

"Now then, my darling, I am wholly thine," were Morven's words when the news of his freedom and its condition were imparted. Ireland existed no more for him as a country.

"*Now*," thought Sir Guy, "when all else has failed, he is wholly hers. Hah ! not so would Hilda have me speak."

But Isabel was content.

And joyful was the return of Sir Guy and Hilda, Isabel and Morven—no longer chieftain of Fitzclare—to the fine old mansion, which, not being secularized property, fortunately bore not the mocking title of Abbey or Priory, and yet, in its grave and stately character, combined somewhat of the monastic with the feudal aspect.

A short time restored the rose-blossom to Isabel's young face, and quelled the restless feverishness of her lover's dark eyes. He

had learned some wisdom in the school of adversity. The death of his beloved Lord had wrought a change that could not again be reversed. Guy saw the change, with pleasure for the fact, though with sorrow for the cause : he was not uneasy now for Isabel's happiness and safety as his wife ; and he soon took care to inform him of the command of Queen Elizabeth that Isabel should be married at once ; a command which, if the girl had not forgotten it, she was slow to repeat, yet not reluctant to be compelled to obey : while her long-engaged, yet still youthful lover, affirmed that this last order of the dying Queen of England was the only one he had ever felt disposed to carry into effect.

“ And we must get married again, Guy,” said Hilda, laughing, “ at least we must celebrate our wedding, for you know, husband, how sad an affair it was.”

“ That I do not know, good wife,” he replied, shaking his head. “ But, though satisfied with it myself, our people here have had no rejoicings nor merry-makings. I owe them somewhat, after so long an absence, and

at that time of mourning, the submission of the good folks to our wishes was praiseworthy. Therefore will we, with thy fair leave, celebrate our wedding-day on the same that unites sweet Isabel to her now wise and prudent lord."

The intention was carried out: and in the graceful church his forefathers had built, and the beauty of which was at that time unmarred by the godless violence of the rebellion of Cromwell, Sir Guy D'Esterre gave the lovely and happy Isabel to Morven Fitzclare; and there he and his own happy Hilda renewed their vows to God and to each other.

The wedding was celebrated with all the boisterous rejoicings, merry-makings, nummings, dancing, and feastings, of that now olden time.

Some few months after its celebration, Morven and his bride departed for the Continent, where he took military service: and there, to this day, may their descendants be traced, under a title so curiously changed as to be discoverable in its etymology only by those who knew the history of its derivation.

Hilda and her husband felt another grief in seeing the ship that bore them pass away from Dover, to which port they had accompanied them. Isabel's little figure melted away from their sight, while, standing on deck, she held one hand to those she left, and held her husband fast to her side by the other.

Sir Guy and his wife returned to their country abode, to lead a life of retirement, but of usefulness : serving God, and serving the poor ; dwelling in love upon earth, and hoping to rest in love in heaven.

Old Anster, as well as his friend D'Esterre, found no difficulty in withdrawing from military life on the accession of the pacific King James. The broken-down soldier gladly took up his quarters in a semi-detached part of our good knight's mansion : and there, while its lady, though attended by some babies of her own, engaged herself also—

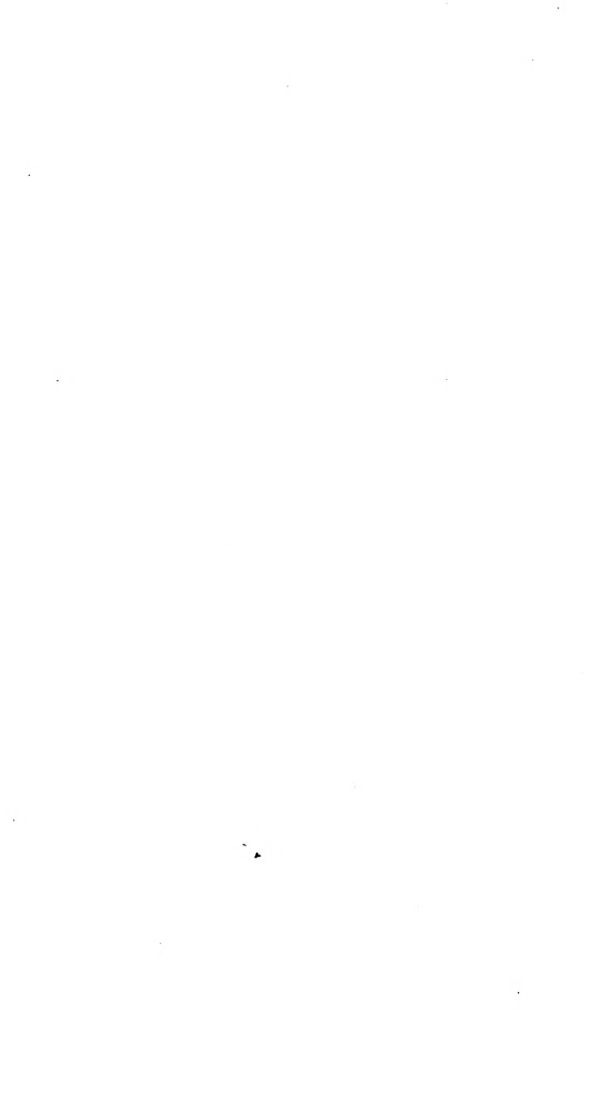
“To rock the cradle of declining years,”

or read for him the Word of Life which maketh age and youth alike wise unto salva-

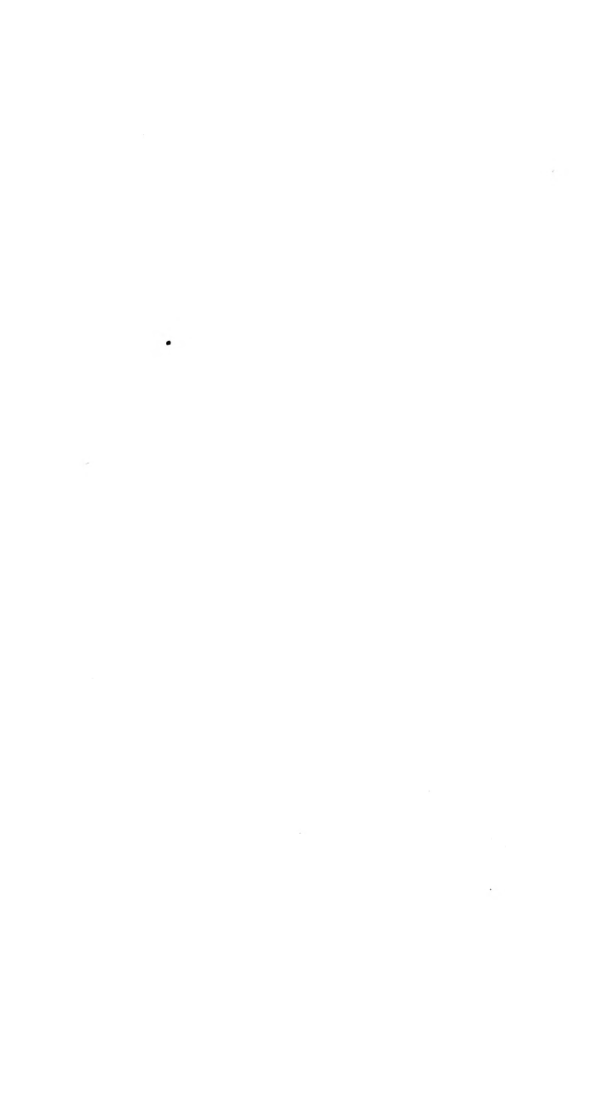
tion—the veteran marvelled more and more at the changes of men's opinions when her husband, as Guy loved to do, would remind him of his ancient fears concerning “her of the Irishry.”

The old soldier was, however, able to give her manly little Devereux the same lessons in the sword exercise which he had given to his father before him. And that Guy's son and heir turned such lessons to good account, there is cause to believe, since, foremost among the brave defenders of his King and Church, in the subsequent troubles brought upon both, might have been found the gallant and worthy son of Sir Guy and Hilda D'Esterre.

THE END.







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